1 What Is Liturgy?

Before discussing the details of specific rites, it might be helpful to establish a coherent picture of the liturgy of the Church. We hardly need to be told what the liturgy is, because we already know. It is rather like the man who was asked whether he believed in infant baptism. "No," he answered, "I've seen it." But the problem is this: when he saw baptism, what did he see? There is an old and familiar story about four blind men who were introduced to an elephant. Later, as they discussed their experience, they violently disagreed about what they had encountered. An elephant, claimed the first man, who had put his arms around the elephant's leg, is a kind of tree: a very large kind of tree is what an elephant is. No, argued the second man, an elephant is a kind of snake with a very coarse skin and a strange, soft mouth. He had, of course, grasped the elephant's trunk. The third man had felt the elephant's ear and swore black and blue that an elephant was a sail on a ship. The fourth man, who had grabbed the elephant's tail, was utterly convinced that an elephant was a piece of old rope.

I. Divergence of Views

Similarly, people have very different and often quite conflicting views on liturgy. This makes the celebration of

the liturgy somewhat problematic. Mention the word "Mass" and some people think of quiet moments in a dark church with the priest afar off quietly muttering the words of ancient Latin and moving gently through the rote of time-hallowed ritual. Others think of guitars and joyful noises, of exuberance and movement and banners and enthusiastic congregations. Others think of a small gathering of friends and neighbors in someone's home for a careful reading of the Scriptures, for spontaneous prayer, and for intimate sharing of the one bread and the one cup. Others think of the Mass in terms of solemn ritual and beautiful music, a liturgy of pomp and circumstance, speaking of a concern to put the best of human gifts and talents at the service of worshipping the transcendent God. For others still, Mass is something you have to attend if you are a Catholic: just that and no more.

Obviously, all of these different views of the Mass lead to different ideas and expectations about what should and should not be. The same is true, of course, for the four men who met the elephant: it would be unwise to put any one of them in charge of the elephant house! The problem with the liturgy, however, is not that we are blind, or that any of these images of the Mass is entirely wrong. The problem is that the liturgy, like the Church itself, is a living mystery. That is, the liturgy, like the Church, is always more than we can say, and it eludes any easy definition. Yet most of us, on the basis of our experience or religious training, have a sort of working definition or an operational image in terms of which we naturally tend to judge liturgies as good or bad, agreeable or disagreeable.

The same is, of course, true of the Church: we all have our working definitions and we respond accordingly. The

National Catholic Reporter has a different image of Church than does *The Wanderer.* Dutch theologians—or some of them—have a different idea of what the Church is, and thus ought to be, than does the Pope. Different images of the Church create different sets of expectations and different ways of evaluating developments in the Church, whether the issue be the ordination of women or the Church's involvement in politics or the direction of ecumenism.

These kinds of disputes are not limited to the national and international scene; they percolate down into the parishes, creating tension and conflict. And it is in the parish that the liturgy is celebrated. Laws may be made in Rome, books may be written in Europe, directives may be issued from Washington, talks may be given at Notre Dame, but it is in a particular parish on a Sunday morning that out of all these rubrics and directives and bright ideas a community has to come to common worship, finding itself gathered together in the Spirit of Jesus before the presence of the Father. There the arguments have to cease —or at least be suspended—and common prayer has to rise up before the throne of God. Decisions have to be made on how we can all celebrate together, and this implies some basic common understanding of what it is we are all about. Celebrating *this* liturgy requires some consensus on what liturgy is for and what it means to be Church.

In this chapter, therefore, I will sketch the broad lines of an understanding of Church and liturgy which might help make sense of the liturgy and offer some sense of direction in its planning. It must be remembered, however, that we are dealing with a mystery when we are engaged

with the Church and her liturgy. We are dealing with something which can never be completely understood or adequately defined, for it is always open to fresh insight and deeper understanding. I offer this sketch, then, not because it is *the* right one and all others are wrong, but simply to serve as a point of common reference for discussion. Much more needs to be said, but this can serve as a starting point: one that is as true as I can make it to the vision of Church and liturgy given to us in the Second Vatican Council.

II. The Church

One of the major considerations which prompted Pope John XXIII to summon the bishops of the world to Rome for the Council was the realization that the developments of modern history had led to a profound change of awareness about the Church and the world. We were in a new situation which raised new pastoral and theological questions. This situation had to be appraised and we had to look to our Tradition for fresh sources in responding to it.

Perhaps this new awareness of the Church's situation in the world can be most dramatically summarized in the use of an image.[1] If the whole history of humanity were scaled down to eight hours, the two thousand years of the Church's history would be represented by only the last couple of minutes. For most of its history, the human race has lived without the presence of the Church and its gospel in its midst. Moreover, even in the time that the Church

1. Juan Segundo, *The Community Called Church*, trans. John Drury, A Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity Series, vol. 1 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973).

has existed, it has never represented the religion of the majority of the human race. This has never really struck home until this century. Previously, Christians believed the world to be more or less evangelized. Of course, in the world as they saw it, there were always some who had still to be converted: underdeveloped peoples on the fringes of the world and a few recusant Jews in the midst of Christendom. But this was the world as they saw it; they were either ignorant of, or blind to, the existence of whole races and cultures living outside that world—peoples they had hardly discovered, living in the Americas and the Far East, in northern wastes and in the antipodes. Only in this century have we really come to full, global awareness of the extent and diversity of the human family. Only in this century have we come to realize, with something of a sense of shock, that most people on this earth have never been members of the Church and that even today, when Christianity is the most populous religion, its adherents still represent a minority of the human race.

This realization leads us to a more humble estimate of the success of Christianity and its role in history. It forces us to question the truth of our assertion that without faith and baptism no one can be saved.[2] Either God's plan was somewhat wider than we had imagined it, or else it was rather late coming into effect, or not very successful in its implementation. The small percentage of Christians in the world raises all sorts of questions, not only about how the unbaptized can be saved outside the Church, but about the

2. For a thoroughly researched, theological study of this question, *see* Jerome Theisen, *The Ultimate Church and the Promise of Salvation* (Collegeville, Minn.: St. John's University Press, 1976).

Church itself. If people can be saved outside the Church, i.e., if God can bring them to life with himself without the waters of baptism, then what is the Church for? If the Church is not absolutely necessary for salvation, what is it for at all?

Such questions have been debated by theologians and lay behind much of the discussion at Vatican II, but they have many ramifications in parish life as well. What is a parish for? Do we have to give the sacraments to anyone and everyone who shows up? Should we baptize every baby that comes our way, regardless of whether that child has any chance of being brought up as a believer? What attitude should we adopt towards people outside the Church?

This new self-realization of the Church's place in human history has led to a new self-image for the Church. Instead of thinking of itself as the only gateway to God, it has come increasingly to see itself as a sign established by God among the nations of the earth: a sign set up in history to show what God has done and is doing for the whole human race, whether he does it visibly or hiddenly.

What is this work of God in human history? It can perhaps best be summed up in the word "reconciliation." God is reconciling the world to himself by overcoming whatever is not of God. God is healing divisions, establishing justice where injustice rules, giving hope to the hopeless, light to the confused, peace to those who are at odds, and support to those whom hurt and fear have turned in upon themselves. In short, the work of God is his victory over sin and the establishment of his rule and Kingdom when evil would enslave us.

This new order is coming about, not only in individual

hearts, but in the human community itself. Thus, through the action of the Holy Spirit, the Kingdom—or rule—of God can spring up at any time and in any place: in a Chinese commune, an Indian village, a Russian factory, a Jewish kibbutz, an Arab family, an inner-city ghetto—wherever, and however fitfully, God's gracious and healing presence overcomes the power of evil. When the mistrust of neighbors is overcome in friendship, when an addict is helped to escape addiction, when a stranger finds welcome, when a person refuses to spread malicious gossip, when a mother by her unconditional love helps her child grow more self-confident and generous, when a nation takes a risk for peace—whenever such things happen there is the presence of God's Spirit, the power of his salvation, and the blossoming of his Kingdom.

The Church is to be a sign to the world of the work of God: not a signpost pointing somewhere else, but a sign, a manifestation, of what God is doing here for all. The Church is a community of people called to recognize and cooperate with that work of God. The Church is a community of believers whose faith is expressed in the acknowledgement of praise and prayer as well as in the acknowledgement that is expressed by putting one's life at the service of the Kingdom of God for the salvation of one's neighbors. The Church, therefore, is a community of people who are caught up wittingly and willingly in a continuing dynamic process: that of recognizing God's saving initiative (which we call "salvation" and "grace"), and that of responding to God himself and to his work. Thus there is, as it were, a double direction to this dynamic process: that of God's coming to us and that of our cooperative response to God.

This pattern of divine initiative and human response is precisely what we discern in the person, life, and actions of Jesus of Nazareth. We acknowledge him as "true God and true man." As "true God" he is the visible outreach of God to his human family, and as "true man" he is not only the visible revelation of God but also the very paradigm or model of human responsiveness to God. This in turn comes to characterize the life of the Church: the same pattern of divine initiative and human response which is manifest in the life and death of Jesus becomes the pattern by which the Church lives. (Even more than that, I would add that it is the underlying pattern of all human life and history insofar as they are true to their vocation as human beings.) In the life of the Church, therefore, just as in the life of Jesus, this twofold pattern of God's initiative and our response is meant to become visible. In ordinary human life it often passes unrecognized and unacknowledged, as we overlook and fail to see the heroism of the everyday. But God has brought it to visibility in the life of Jesus, and he calls for the Church, too, to embody it from generation to generation, precisely so that people may recognize that same pattern in their own lives and commit themselves to it—to the gracious presence of God and to the recognition and obedience which that presence entails. Consequently, it is impossible to overestimate, for the well-being of the *world*, the importance of faith and holiness in the *Church*. The Church cannot regard herself as simply "having the goods" ready to hand out, as if salvation were some kind of supernatural commodity. On the contrary, she is to be a sign of redemption in a world in process of being redeemed. But the world is being redeemed from the evil which prevents it from becoming

what God intends it to be, and so the Church is supposed to be a sign of hope, a sign of what can be, a promise of a better world. Even here, however, we have no room to boast, for the Church is made up of people like us; it is part of the world and is itself in continual need of God's redemptive grace and of conversion and reform in response to that grace.

III. The Liturgy

In that broader context we can begin to appreciate the liturgy of the Church. The liturgy is really nothing else than the celebration of that ongoing process of redemption in and of the world. The liturgy is the "source and summit" of Christian life, as Vatican II called it, because it is in the liturgical celebration that that same pattern of initiative and response, of divine action and human cooperation, which underlies all Christian life and faith, comes to its most explicit expression.

This pattern and process of divine initiative and human response finds expression in the liturgy in various ways. The pattern of God's gracious initiative, his outreach towards us, is obviously expressed in the reading of his Word and in the gift of himself which comes to us through the various sacraments. But the first and basic sign of his intervention in human affairs is the very existence of the gathered congregation. If Catholics were asked why they attend Mass on any given Sunday, most would probably say they were there because it means a lot to them, or because they like worshipping in this parish, or because as Catholics they feel obliged to be there. Yet, if we reflect on it, we have to say that the reason people gather for Mass

on Sunday is that God has called them together. In contemporary society, where people believe all sorts of things or don't believe at all, the faith that draws us to church on Sunday, while one neighbor mows the lawn and another sits and reads the papers, can give us a vivid sense of vocation or calling. It is not that we are better or worse than our neighbors but that we, for God's own mysterious reasons, have been selected and called by him to acknowledge him and recognize what he is doing. The Sunday congregation, however lukewarm and listless, however confused and prejudiced it might be, is nevertheless what we refer to when we praise God on the grounds that "from age to age you gather a people to yourself."

This congregation is the sign set among the nations – or at least, set up in this neighborhood – to testify to the reality of God and to his concern for the human race. Of course, it might not be a very good sign of God's salvation: it can be riddled with cliques, smug and self-satisfied, lacking any sense of itself as a Christian community, even rife with prejudice and soiled with social injustice. Such a community hardly deserves the name of "Christian community" at all, for to the degree its life is shaped by the ways of the world and not the ways of God it fails in its vocation to be a sign.

That is one good reason why we have liturgy and why, at the very beginning of the liturgy, we have a penitential rite. The purpose of the penitential rite at the beginning of the Mass is not so much to enable us to clean the slate of personal peccadilloes but to enable us to recognize that, although we have gathered to make visible the Body of Christ, which is the Church, we have not lived as members of that Body. We have not been faithful to our common

vocation to offer to the world a sign of hope and renewal; we have not lived a lifestyle which contradicts the individualism, self-interest, and consumerism of the age; we have not shown, together, that divisions, prejudice, injustice, and indifference can be overcome through the power of God. Instead we have developed the kind of spotty lives which enable us to merge unnoticed, like the chameleon, into our secular environment. Thus God remains unnoticed, unanswered and, indeed, helpless in the world which belongs to him but does not know him.

Still, even recognizing our common and personal infidelity, when we gather together for the celebration of the liturgy, that is what we are: a people called together by God to be his witnesses and his fellow-workers in human history. We are the Body of Christ, his arms and legs and feet and hands, for the world he loves. The liturgy, says Pope Pius XII, is the worship of the whole Body of Christ, head and members. At the liturgy, we are summoned together into the presence of the Father, who is the Father of all. We are gathered "in Christ," for without Christ we could not so stand before God. And we are gathered through the Spirit of Christ, who is poured out into our hearts to form us into "one body, one spirit, in Christ."

Thus the coming together of the congregation is a sign and symbol of what God is doing and where his work is going. God's work in history, we have seen, is to gather into one the scattered children of God, to overcome divisions, to provide a place for the homeless and the lonely, to give support to those whose burdens are heavy, and to create an oasis of community in the midst of a world painfully divided into the haves and the have-nots. Here, in the congregation of God, we are all to discover

our common humanity and to set aside our inequities. The gathering of believers is meant to be the anticipation of the day when God's Kingdom will be established in all its fullness, when there will be no more discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, or wealth; when there will be no more hunger and thirst, no more mistrust and mutual violence, no more competitiveness and abuse of power, for all things will be subject to Christ, and God will reign over his people in peace and for ever. In the words of Vatican II:

> The liturgy daily builds up those who are in the Church, making of them a holy temple of the Lord, a dwelling-place for God in the Spirit, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ. At the same time it marvelously increases their power to preach Christ and thus show forth the Church, a sign lifted up among the nations . . . under which the scattered children of God may be gathered together until there is one fold and one shepherd. (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 2)

IV. Liturgical Changes

That sounds fine in theory or as an ideal, but it was precisely to make that ideal both more credible and more realizable that Vatican II undertook the reform of the liturgy. The problem with the liturgy is that, like all enterprises involving human beings, it can get tired and stale and settle into a rut, or it can even be put to uses for which it was not intended. For example, the liturgy was from the beginning a community affair, but in the course of time it became more or less privatized. I mean not only "private Masses," but "private baptism," "private penance," and the whole way of celebrating which relied upon the activity of

an authorized priest and the more or less passive presence of a congregation that was more a collection of individuals than an organic unity. As a result, the liturgy was seen as being primarily for the sanctification of individuals who were baptized, confirmed, or went to Mass for the benefit of their own interior lives. Even at Sunday Mass, the community event par excellence, people were scattered about the church engaging in their private prayers and devotions as the Mass went on at the altar.

The rubrics of the Old Mass, as they were fixed in the sixteenth century, were exclusively concerned with the priest. They began with the words: "When the priest is duly vested, he takes the chalice in his left hand . . . and carries it in front of him, his right hand resting on the burse which is placed on top of the chalice; and, making a reverence to the Cross, or to an image thereof, in the sacristy, he proceeds to the altar with his head covered and with the server going before him with the Missal and whatever else might be necessary. . . ." The new equivalent of that rubric reads, "When the people have assembled, the priest and ministers proceed to the altar in the following order. . . ." Moreover, the old rubrics mentioned the congregation only three times: once to indicate the direction in which the priest should say "Dominus vobiscum"; once to suggest that, after the priest has received Communion from the chalice, "if there are some who wish to communicate," he may give Communion; and finally, to tell the priest to face the people when giving the blessing. In the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* (1969) the Order of Mass with a Congregation is made normative, and much is made of the role of the people as a whole and of the various ministries within the assembly.

Nevertheless, if in the past the liturgy became something highly formal and individualistic, the danger today is perhaps that it often risks becoming a sort of churchy hoe-down. In reaction against the timelessness and otherworldliness of the old liturgy, and in the quest for what is often referred to as "meaningful" and "relevant," some groups turn liturgical celebrations into affirmations of life and faith which are often too flimsy and too superficial to be sustaining. Many parishes have found that the youth Masses which attracted such enthusiasm a few years ago are now becoming stereotyped and boring and that the music and lyrics collected in the now worn-out parochial anthologies have come to sound banal.

A poster in a convent chapel proclaims: "Celebrate life where you find it!"—a sentiment not untypical of the liturgies of the last fifteen years. But the problem is, where is life found? Is this living? Faith and liturgy which are content to affirm the goodness of everything and which harp on the theme of joy, joy, joy are not true to life as we know it nor to the Christian tradition. Whereas the old liturgy tended to lock each of us into our own private devotional world, the new liturgy can be celebrated in such a way that we end up being locked into pseudo-togetherness. The painful and challenging experiences of life are simply ignored, and we pretend the Kingdom is already here or at least just waiting to be ushered in with waves and cheers.

The problem with both these approaches to liturgy is that they collapse the tension which is inherent in Christian living and in the liturgy itself. The first, with its emphasis on the supernatural, the private, and the otherworldly, looks to a future which has nothing intrinsically to do with

life on earth. Life on earth is just an obstacle course for pious souls; the Kingdom of God will be their reward in the hereafter. This view also tends to see God in his heaven and the devil in the world, so that the sacraments are means of getting grace to join the one and fight the other—but all very interiorly and privately.

The other, more contemporary view emphasizes the reality of Christ's presence in the world: in sunsets and butterflies and human faces. It talks a lot about community and togetherness and love as present realities. The world is good and people are good and life is good and we are good and God is good: "Go tell everyone the news that the Kingdom is come!" Bum-bum! This view tends to see God everywhere and the devil nowhere, and the sacraments are all "celebrations," which means they ought to be fun.

V. Tensions in Christian Life and Liturgy

Admittedly, these two views of liturgy are caricatures, and the adherents of either view could justifiably complain. I offer these caricatures, however, not so much to mock people's devotion as to call to our awareness the tension that has to be retained. And the word is tension, not balance. Tension creates energy; balance, once achieved, presumes a state of repose. No, there needs to be in our liturgy a tension between the present and the future, between the personal and the communal, between the ideal of the Kingdom and the realities of present experience in the world. In the life of Jesus, it was this tension which was the message of his preaching and work: "The Kingdom is here, in your midst; therefore repent!" (Not "have fun!") But even here where the Kingdom is, there is still a world

where the Kingdom is not yet in control. We have no doubt of the outcome, but this confidence is a call to obedience and mission, not an excuse to play around. The work of God is in process: this means that we still need his redemption, as individuals, as communities, as nations, as a race. It means that we are not alone and that we need never despair, but it also means that we are called to work for that Kingdom, to allow God to be king, to rule in our hearts and in our society. Either to act as if all were accomplished and all were well with the world, or else to act as if the world and its affairs had nothing to do with a Kingdom that will only be established after death and out of time, would be to misunderstand both the nature of Christian life and the nature of Christian liturgy.

The liturgy is of the present, but it points to the future. It is of this world, but it points to a reality which transcends present experience. It is of the present, because it celebrates and makes real the presence among us of the God who is saving the world in Christ, but that very presence makes us painfully aware of how far we are from the Kingdom of God. It constitutes a call to live and work for the values of God, which are not the values of a society which takes for granted inequality, competitiveness, prejudice, infidelity, international tension, and unbounded consumption. The liturgy celebrates the presence of God's Kingdom, but it is a presence which contradicts us in many ways and calls us into a future that is of God's making and not a construct of Western civilization. Thus it continually challenges us to repent, to be converted, to live a new and different kind of life.

Likewise, the liturgy is of this world, yet it points to a way of being in the world which recognizes its real depth

of meaning. For example, liturgy draws on all the elements of our lives: our bodies, significant persons, society, and the things we use to sustain and enhance our lives. It teaches us to use our bodies to house the presence of God, to worship him and to serve him, and to bring his Word and healing to others. It teaches us to listen to the voice of God in the voice of others, and to receive at the hands of others the gifts of God himself. It teaches us to live in the society of others, people of different background and different race, as men and women committed to peace and unity and mutual help. It teaches us to use the goods of the earth—represented in the liturgy by bread and wine and water and oil—not as goods to be grabbed, accumulated, and consumed, but as sacraments of the Creator himself, to be accepted with thanksgiving, handled with reverence, and shared with generosity.

Yes, the liturgy *is* an expression of our faith and love, but it also shapes and deepens our faith and love. It teaches us how to live with faith and how to come to deeper and truer love. It teaches us that faith, hope, and love come to life to the degree that we acknowledge and surrender to the work of God in the world. The liturgy, we know, begins and ends with the Sign of the Cross, for it is the Cross which is the sign both of God's love for us and of Jesus' human response to that love. He loved to the end, he was obedient even to death on a Cross.

Thus the liturgy brings us to the realization that there is no love without sacrifice, no life except through death to "life as we know it." In the liturgy and in life we identify ourselves with the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, too, may become manifest in us. The heart of the liturgy, the heart of all the sacraments, from baptism to the rites

for the dying, is the paschal mystery: the mystery of God's initiative and our response as revealed in the death and resurrection of the Lord.

So we come back to where we began, to the role of the Christian community in the world. The reason why there is a community of believers is to acknowledge the work of God in human life and to cooperate with the purposes of God in human history. That work is a work of love and redemption, involving submission to God and commitment to the renewal of the face of the earth. It is not only bread and wine which are transformed in the liturgy; *we* are to be transformed by associating ourselves in the self-sacrifice of Jesus, that God may raise us up continually to newness of life. But it does not end there, for the bread and wine are transformed so that we might be transformed, and we are transformed so that the Church might be transformed, and the Church is to be transformed continually so that the world itself might be transformed by being rebuilt under the rule of God for the well-being of all humanity.

The liturgy is not the be-all and end-all of the Christian life; Vatican II speaks of it only as the "source and summit" of Christian living, admitting that there are many other things to be done in between. Nevertheless, we can learn from the liturgy the pattern of God's presence in the world, discerning his saving presence in all human situations in the light of his more explicit presence in the language and symbols of the liturgy. The liturgy makes explicit what is hidden and implicit in human history: it recalls what God has done in the past, that we might recognize the same God at work in the present, and it reminds us of the goal to which the world and its history are to be directed. It puts

us in touch with the mystery that lies at the very heart of things.

VI. Conclusion: Some General Principles

This sketchy presentation of a theology of the liturgy is not going to provide easy answers for all practical questions about what must be done, whether in planning a liturgy or in living our lives. It is intended simply to serve as a basis for reflection and discussion of what we are about when we are planning and celebrating liturgies, and to offer a view of the wider context within which such planning takes place. For as we all know too well, we can get so preoccupied with the details that we lose sight of the whole and find ourselves proposing liturgical changes without much sense of the larger shape of things. In conclusion, a few general principles might be useful.

1. Liturgy is never perfect. The liturgy we celebrate will never be adequate to the mystery it contains. More often than not, our liturgical celebrations will speak not only of the wonders of God, but of the brokenness and limitations of us who celebrate. Too easily we get caught in a critical attitude and then become angry and frustrated at the stupidity of our brothers and sisters in Christ, even to the point where we can no longer give ourselves over to the prayer of the liturgy. The only way out of that is to allow the Spirit of God to convert our indignation into compassion. This does not mean giving up the effort to improve our liturgical celebrations, but it does mean recognizing that at the heart of our liturgy stands the one who emptied himself for our sakes, the one who had compas-

sion on the multitude, the one who was treated as a fool and put to death by those who were exasperated by him.

2. Liturgy does not always have to be different. The temptation of all liturgy planners is to look for new and exciting ways of doing things. But liturgy is ritual, not entertainment. It is meant to form us, not to have us on the edge of our seats. The liturgy keeps bringing us back to old *words* until we begin to understand them, and to old *signs* until we begin to see what they mean. Our care should be to let the words be heard, to let the images shimmer, to let the gestures be done so clearly that they speak for themselves. A corollary of this is that liturgical texts and actions should not be continually explained; they are rich in meaning, inviting insight, not explanation.

3. Liturgy is prayer. It involves prayerful togetherness, prayerful hearing of the Word, prayerful concern for the larger world, prayerful acknowledgement of the works of God, prayerful acceptance of the gifts of God, and prayerful acceptance of his commission to go and serve his Kingdom in our lives. The place where the community gathers, wherever that may be, is not a classroom or a dance hall or a theater or a cafeteria or a private meditation room; it is a house of common prayer for the People of God.

4. Liturgy is not so much a celebration of life-as-we-know-it as it is a celebration of the mystery of life we hardly suspect. While it uses the stuff of everyday life—word and song, movement and food, meeting and touching, candles and flowers, tables and chairs—it uses them all with a sense of the holiness of these things. This holiness

is derived not so much from their presence in a sacred place as from a recognition of the sacred presence which pervades all places. The people and language and things of the liturgy are to be handled with reverence and care. Ours is a pragmatic culture, with little sense of the lovely. Part of our liturgical ministry will be to ensure that the things we use and the things we do liturgically serve to develop people's sensitivity to the loveliness of all created things, a loveliness which is but an expression and reflection of the beauty of the Creator himself.

5. Liturgy is "service"—an ambiguous term referring both to our service of God and to God's service of us. Both senses of the term come together in our service of one another, for it is God who serves and is served in the mutual care we show one another. Sometimes, when we are exercising a liturgical ministry—whether it be reading or playing music or acting as an usher or a minister of Communion—we find ourselves "distracted." Maybe so. But it is also important for us to be aware of who it is we serve when we serve one another, or else our ministry itself may become distracting to others.