

emmanuelworship

THE LORD OF THE LITURGY

BY PAT KEADY

The 'Liturgy of the Eucharist', also known as 'the Mass' has to be one of the most hotly contested topics in the history of the Catholic Church. And the place that music has to play in this 'source and summit of our faith' is a can of worms that often only the brave dare open!

Aware of the risk, nevertheless I feel compelled to 'open the can', because I truly believe that **the worms come from us, not from God**. The mystery that is 'the Mass' is the Food of Life, the Cup of Salvation and a million other incomprehensible mysteries all rolled up into one. Far from being a can of worms, the Eucharist is in reality a **life-giving banquet** for everyone who comes to the table – for at its heart is the author of Life Himself, Jesus Christ. One of the things Jesus is often remembered as saying is:

“I have come that you may have life, and life to the full”

John 10:10

Jesus came to give us life! And the Eucharist that Christ left us was for the very same reason:

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

John 6:51

Now to be honest, sometimes I have experienced a 'vacuum of life' in the very liturgies which are meant to revolve around Christ, the author of Life. I don't say this to be critical, just honest. Has anyone else ever felt that way? Stick around long enough and you'll know what I mean. Rather than exceptions, you find restrictions. Rather than Grace, Law. Rather than mercy, judgements. Rather than 'a deep breath in', a 'deep exhalation out'. This all sounds very dramatic, but that is the effect that 'worms' have on perfectly good food; they destroy the goodness that is there in the beginning.

I think it's important to emphasise that 'the worms of worship' don't come from God, they come from the imperfect human beings like you and me who make up the Church. It is SO vital to keep our eyes on Christ so that we do not become discouraged! This is what 'fighting over liturgy' does, which is a real temptation of the enemy among the Body of Christ these days. It destroys faith, discourages people, and creates an ever-widening rift of division in the Body of Christ. It seems to be one of those things that Jesus just knew was bound to happen:

“Do you think that I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.”

Luke 12:51

What does all this have to do with MUSIC? A lot! Because the way we approach anything in the Church all starts with how we understand Jesus Himself. When it comes down to it, when we strip everything away, Jesus is meant to be the centre of it all. He is the 'central actor' in the play. Everything comes back to Jesus. If somehow we haven't heard His message right, it affects the way we approach everything, including our worship of Him in the liturgy.

A brief look at the life of Jesus shows an often unpredictable man who sat down to eat with people like Zacheuss the tax-collector (quite an unpopular move there), protected a woman caught in adultery (now he's protecting prostitutes) healed the son of a Roman soldier (whose side is this guy on?) among a hundred other discrepancies. None of these people were considered 'good, holy or acceptable' in the eyes of the people at the time. I reckon they still wouldn't be highly acceptable among most congregations today either. Right from the start *we have Jesus doing things differently to the way we would do them* and unsettling people who liked things just the way they were.

Does this sound familiar to anyone? Don't be too quick to point the finger, we all like something 'just the way it was'; either the music's too loud, the music's too soft, the music's too old or the music's too new – take your pick!

To keep us in check, I believe an important aspect of the gospel which we could all be reminded of is **Jesus' attitude toward the Sabbath**. The Sabbath is 'the seventh day', the holy day of rest for Jews which Christians eventually transitioned to Sunday ('the eighth day') in honour of the resurrection of Christ. Sabbath is the day when the Jewish people gather in Synagogue to worship and pray, the foundational model for the early Christians who eventually gathered in homes and churches to do the same on Sunday, 'the New Sabbath'. With this in mind, listen closely to what Jesus had to say about the observance of 'Sabbath' in the following encounters:

"One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"

He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions."

Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Mark 2:23-28

Did you hear that? **'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.'** For us today let me rephrase that now to say: *'Church on Sunday was made for man, not man for Church on Sunday'*. That's mind-blowing. This simple statement of Jesus challenges us to remember that *everything we do in worship needs to consider people first*. Which is weird because I thought it was all about putting God first, right? 'Worship is about God, not about us'; I've heard it a thousand times. It's not about our feelings but our choices; not about what we do but about what God has done. Absolutely! So let's be clear, we're not the centrepiece - Christ is. But here and in a hundred other situations we continually find our centrepiece - Christ - placing *people* at the centre of His attention! So what should we do?

Help people, don't hinder them.

We need to ask ourselves 'who are the people hungry and in need?' Like David's companions and Jesus' disciples in the scriptures above; are they even being considered in our elaborate plans? Have we even made space for them? I think it's a good question. A *necessary* question if we want to follow in the mind of Jesus; for to make space for the least important of people among us is to make space for Christ himself. 'Mums with crying babies' springs immediately to mind. I was at a wedding recently where the only appropriate place in the end was outside the building for the entire service! 'Visitors who don't know any of the responses' is another. We may as well say to them 'you don't belong here' straight up, because they often leave feeling that way anyway. 'Young people

who can't relate to the music' is a refrain that's just getting so repetitious now to the point of being ridiculous. Either we care about those who don't come to the table with us, or we just keep caring about ourselves.

Read another example from Jesus' life:

“Another time he (Jesus) went into the synagogue, and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shrivelled hand, “Stand up in front of everyone.”

Then Jesus asked them, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent.

He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.
Mark 3:1-6

It is so clear that at the centre of Jesus' attention were PEOPLE; living, breathing people, whom He desperately wanted to heal and restore and love back to life! I truly believe that our music, our worship and all our liturgies should reflect this central heartbeat of Christ. Whether we're playing for a congregation of teenagers on Sunday night or at 7am Mass for the elderly, our music and our attitude should seek to serve and lead *those people* to an experience of Jesus' love and grace.

It's always easier to presume that 'we would never be this way' and that it's others who need to hear this message. But every one of us – no matter what our liturgical or stylistic leanings may be - need to be careful that WE do not become the ones with 'stubborn hearts', closed to any new suggestions or 'departures from the norm' that might fulfil the spirit of the Sabbath at a given time. It's not beyond any of us to become fixated on our own way of doing things you know.

So what's the litmus test? What will your deciding factor be the next time you find yourself stuck between two approaches to take? Why not try this one:

"If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a person than a sheep!"

Math 12:11

Who is the Lord of your of your Sabbath?

Everything else falls into place once you answer that question.