

Easter 7

Next Sunday will be Pentecost, and the Sunday after that will be Trinity Sunday, and the Sunday after that will be dedicated to the Body and Blood of Christ, and will be our First Communion Sunday. And then the following Sunday we will be back in liturgical Ordinary Time. It will start on the 13th of June and it will be the 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Why we start with the 11th and not the first Sunday of Ordinary Time, I don't know. I suspect it depends on how early or late Easter is and therefore the numbers of weeks there are between Easter and the beginning of Advent.

One other liturgical item may also be of interest. In the past it was the custom to keep the lighted Easter Candle, the symbol of the risen Lord, next to the altar until Ascension Thursday when it was extinguished after the reading of the Gospel, symbolizing the Lord's ascension into heaven, and then removed from the altar. But now the instructions tell us that it is to remain next to the altar until Pentecost Sunday, inclusive. I am presuming that if it is to remain there, it should also be lighted!

But what has all that to do with the price of fish? That is, what relevance does the liturgy have for our daily lives? Well, since we

are believers, and since the language of belief is prayer, prayer is very important for us, and the liturgy is our prayer, our public or communal prayer. So it is good to know something about how it is structured.

Suppose you were asked what a parish is? What would you say? One right answer would be that a parish is a community of people who pray. That is certainly true of this parish, and I suspect it is true of every single Catholic parish in the whole world. What a parish does most is pray. Here we pray every day of the week, and three times on Fridays. Besides that we do a bit of study of the Scriptures on Wednesday mornings, which of course leads to prayer. We also visit the sick and of course pray with them. And then we have our fund-raising activities like our meals and the annual bazaar. But these are sporadic. Our prayer, on the other hand, is constant, even daily. And that is our parish. Of course our prayer ought to lead us back to daily life and determine how we live it. If it does not do that, there is something wrong with it. It is not producing its proper fruit, which is Christian living. When it is real, prayer affects our lives. It is the engine of our transformation into Christ.

But prayer in itself is not activity in the ordinary sense of that word. Prayer is more like leisure. It is, as the old coke advertisement said, “the pause that refreshes.” It is the quiet before the storm, the storm of activity which we call ordinary life. Many of us are not good with leisure. Maybe that is why we may have difficulty with praying. You know how some of us Catholics get impatient after forty-five minutes (Boy, that was a long Mass!) and even walk out. I know no one does that here, but I have heard it happens in other parishes. But most of us like a little bit of leisure. We like to sit down at the end of the day and turn on the TV and surface the channels. If you come to a ball game and can watch it, I would say that you are a good candidate for prayer, because a ball game requires patience. You have to wait for something to happen. You are of necessity put into leisure mode. You have to be still and wait, and those are prerequisites for prayer.

Prayer is a form of mysticism. Yes, there is prayer that is busy. We “say” prayers and ask for something and do it all in a kind of hurried way. But prayer in the true sense of the word is a waiting upon God. It is like taking up a position opposite a conversation partner, a position of attentive listening. “Yes,” we say to the other person, “I am waiting to hear what you have to say.”

The German theologian Karl Rahner said that in the future every committed Christian will have to be a mystic. Why? I believe he meant that in the future when our world will be entirely secularized, it will be necessary for those who wish to remain Christians to dig more deeply into their faith and then they will discover that this faith teaches them that God and they are one, and that is mysticism. Our readings today are examples of such mysticism. The Gospel sounds involuted, rolled up in a spiral, and it is such. Jesus is telling us that the Father and he are one, and that we too are caught up into this unity. Here Jesus prays to the Father about us. He says: "Father, I wish that where I am they also may be with me.... I made known to them your name and I will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them." This is the language of union, the language of love, the language of the mystics. And in our second reading today from Revelation poetic names are heaped on Jesus. He is the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. He is the root and offspring of David and the bright morning star. And the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the bride (the church) say to us: Come! And we answer in turn: "Maranatha," that is, "Come, Lord Jesus!" All this language is the language of love, the language of the mystics. It tells us what our faith ultimately is. It tells us that God and we are one in Jesus, and teaches us to pray

that this union may one day be completely fulfilled. Thus we are left with this final short prayer on our lips: Come, Lord Jesus! May this call to Christ be our prayer each day of our lives and the final prayer on our lips in death.