

Questions for Liturgical Ministers

Each one has a role to play in the drama of the Mass

By DENISE SIMEONE

Have you seen a play or an opera lately? Or have you been an actor or stagehand in a theater production? Most of us have participated in or witnessed such productions. They take much more than haphazard and unplanned movement, gestures or speech; we know there are cues and steps that participants must follow so it all flows smoothly. We might not imagine it this way, but liturgy needs the same care and attentiveness from the whole assembly of the people.

We all have stories of things we've seen at eucharistic liturgies in our own church or when we were visiting another. I have seen liturgical ministers walk, bow or make other gestures that distracted me from the focus and dignity of the liturgy. I have watched lectors tiptoe cautiously to the ambo rather than walk with the confidence that they are bringing Christ into our midst by their proclamation of the word. I have seen cantors who fail to connect with us because they never look up from their music.

But I have also participated in liturgies where the liturgical ministers fulfilled their roles with such purpose and reverence that they could not help but draw me, along with the entire assembly, into being a more prayerful participant.

Every minister fulfills a public role that is intended to call each of us to fuller participation in the liturgy. Here are some questions for these particular liturgical ministries that might be useful for personal or group reflection.

■ Greeters:

Do you recognize new people who may not be parish members or who don't regularly attend a particular liturgy? Can you introduce and connect new people with other parishioners? Do you talk with children, and have you ever stooped down to look them directly in their eyes? Are

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you aware of people with special needs such as hearing difficulties or wheelchair access? Does your church make a concerted effort to assist these people? If not, will you be a voice for them? Do you have a space for families with babies or restless children? Can you put together some materials to help children? (Some churches have small book bags filled with things for children to read or do in church that the kids return after use.) Do you have a welcome packet of information for visitors and new parishioners? Are you involved in your parish's welcoming efforts, or if you don't have such a program, can you start one?

■ Lectors and cantors:

When you approach the ambo to do a reading, are you alert to the appropriate ritual gestures to make, such as bowing? Do you dress in a way that makes you visible to the assembly without attracting unnecessary attention? Do you walk to the ambo with confidence, aware of your role of proclaiming to the church? Do you look at the assembly especially when you announce or conclude the reading or sing and lead the responses? Do you read and sing carefully and create good pacing? Are you aware of church acoustics and of how to use your microphone so that all may hear? Do you read, pray, and reflect on the Sunday readings throughout the week even if you are not the lector or cantor? If you lead the responsorial, do you reflect upon

the entire psalm? Do you study to increase your knowledge of the Bible? Can you participate in retreats or programs about scripture to deepen your understanding? Can you support the development of scripture study groups in your parish?

■ Eucharistic ministers:

Do you carry yourself with reverence for not only the body and blood but also for the assembly of the people, where Christ is present? Do you dress appropriately for the ministry in your community? Do you look into people's eyes when you offer them Christ's body or blood? Do you reflect on your ministerial call to feed and nourish? Do you participate in eucharistic adoration? Do you participate in parish or neighborhood programs such as a food pantry? Can you volunteer in a soup kitchen or meal program for the homebound to feed those who are hungry, lonely or in need? Can you bake bread for your parish liturgies or special events? Can you provide food for bereaved families or funeral meals or begin such a program if your parish does not have one?

It is not the same as a theatrical play — but liturgy is a drama that unfolds before our eyes. Liturgical ministers play an important role in calling each of us in the assembly to reflect on our own parts and responses. When ministers are prepared, the rest of us feel more confident. We enter into the liturgy more fully, pray and reflect with passion. When we see liturgical ministers work and minister in the community outside of liturgy, their witness calls us to delve more deeply into how we too are called to discover God within liturgy and within our world. We are sent forth to love and serve the Lord!

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