

# Catholic Rites Are User-Friendly

---

**BY THE REVEREND CHARLES E. SINGLER, D.MIN.**

*Rector of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Cathedral  
Director of the Office of Worship, Diocese of Toledo*

© October 19, 2006

One of the frequent comments I hear from a number of parish liturgists and liturgical coordinators diocesan-wide is the struggle encountered in their work to plan prayer that is meaningful. Further inquiry into the meaning of this experience leads me to conclude that perhaps the concern is not so much a matter of creating something new in the way of ritual practices and text formularies, but a very strong push to know and be informed of the rich treasury of the Church's rites and prayers.

For instance, one liturgist who has been working in her parish well over 25 years was surprised to hear that a ritual for the blessing of a Christmas crèche was available in the *Book of Blessings*. I remember teaching seminarians in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati several years ago who were utterly surprised that the *Sacramentary* contained a collection of General Intercessions (Prayer of the Faithful) for specific seasons during the liturgical year; or the same group that was unaware of the fact that special prayers in the *Order of Christian Funerals* existed for those difficult situations: death of a young person, one who died a violent death, or one who died by suicide. These prayers are part of a great treasury approved for use in the liturgy.

The liturgical renewal of the Second Vatican Council has promoted a sensitivity and attention to the multiple circumstances we encounter in life. As what we might call second and third generation rituals are being published, the Church has tried very hard to be sensitive to those circumstances in which our rites are celebrated. There are even pastoral provisions in a number of our rites when a particular formulary may be spoken freely by the one presiding in similar words to the printed text.

Clearly, the liturgical rites we celebrate as Catholics are "user-friendly" and often do not need to be altered or re-written. When we take liberties to alter Mass orations or formularies for the celebration of the sacraments that are set by the Church because they do not reflect the particular occasion or situation that has brought the community of the faithful together, we run the greater risk of losing the spiritual depth and meaning that the Church has scrutinized and sanctioned in its public prayer.

Liturgists who change scriptural texts because they do not agree with a particular translation, or wish to take it upon themselves to edit a lectionary text to ease the message run the risk of skewing the original intent and meaning of the text. What they think has been adaptive, inclusive or sensitive on their own, causes nothing but question and doubt in the hearts of the hearers when newly revised texts have been translated and authorized.

The same is true regarding the personal preferences of some who preside over the sacred rites. A priest-celebrant who decides on his own that the present authorized funeral ritual issued in 1989 does not express enough of what he thinks it should be saying and instead uses selective parts or the entire funeral rite of 1969 after it was suppressed is obstructing the liturgical “right” the Church intends for its members. When this happens, we begin to erode the whole understanding of public, corporate prayer. Liturgy and liturgical rites are more than the one presiding and those who prepare it. They are an act of the whole Church.

One of the ways to encourage proper preparation of our sacramental rites is for those entrusted with liturgical leadership to read the ritual texts cover to cover so that they know exactly what is contained in them. Knowing the options will promote a greater sensitivity to the circumstances encountered by the people of God. The general introductions to the ritual books offer a clear and concise explanation of the “why” behind certain practices, as well as the underlying theological foundation that guides the celebration of our liturgical rites.

Further, those who prepare liturgical celebrations in our parishes need to read closely the provisions throughout the rites that call for certain adaptation so that if such circumstances arise in the parish, these options may be incorporated. Liturgy evokes a very strong emotion in the hearts of many people. It is important that those who are entrusted to prepare and lead our public rites know fully and understand completely the treasury of prayers available to us.