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Community— *Me, You and Us*

Community is central to good liturgy. Often it is seen as a social rather than a theological issue. But it's really both. God meets us where we are, amidst family, neighbors and strangers. The cross serves as a metaphor both for our relationship with God (the vertical beam) and our relationship with the community (the horizontal beam). Both are needed for liturgy to function well. So, our way of approaching liturgy represents an important choice. Do we see mass from a perspective of *me*, *you* or *us*?

From the *me* perspective, we look for things that we ourselves want. We may evaluate the physical look of the church and want more statues, or fewer; more traditional art, or more contemporary art. What about the style of music we prefer? Do we want more organ, or less; more guitar, or less? Is a 10 minute homily too long? Is five minutes too short? What about the length of mass? Is an hour too long? An African priest once said: "If mass doesn't last two hours, the people feel I haven't done my job very well." All of these expectations raise the question of whether the culture itself supports or hinders good liturgy.

Approaching mass from the *me* place may lead to an "I don't get anything out of it" feeling. On the other hand, the frequent response: "You get out of it what you put into it" can easily create expectations of others. This is a *you* approach. You may want others to be quiet or leave you alone. Or, you may want them to engage you with a cheery "Good morning." Because we have little control over the outcome, the *you* approach, like the *me* approach, often leaves us dissatisfied and disgruntled.

Eucharistic liturgy, often called the Sacrament of Unity, is communal by design. We are to join our prayer with the prayer of the priest, and as the General Instruction of the Roman Missal says, "learn to offer ourselves." Following the

consecration, we pray with the priest that we may all be one in the Body of Christ. Does this mean that we lose our individuality? No. It helps us recognize that we ourselves and the community are included in this family of God. How can we do that if we approach the liturgy from the *me* perspective?

An *us* approach to liturgy can help us find deeper meaning in the ritual. Coming to mass with an openness to what the church asks leads us to pose different questions, such as "How do we pray together?" It helps us to be open to God's presence "where two or three are gathered."

The opening song, whether played on our favorite instrument or not, leads us to reflect on what we celebrate. Joining in song with others helps us recognize our place in the community.

The liturgical environment, whether crowded or sparse, reminds us that God created the world, the flowers and the greenery. We decorate with nature's gifts each season to give thanks and to remember God's presence. A larger view of the environment leads us to be aware of the people around us, God's people — even those who have died.

The readings and the homily, whether long or short, bring us to understand that we are called to be Christ in this world and that our lives are connected to the community. The prayers for unity in the liturgy guide us to grow beyond ourselves and become more aware of the Body of Christ.

Liturgy calls us to be concerned for the other, to be more tolerant, to be more selfless. This ongoing conversion extends from the baptism that welcomed us into God's family, where our journey with Christ began. We still journey, the liturgy reminds us. We are moving toward Christ. We are becoming more like him, more united with him. Good liturgy reminds us that the community walks with us on this journey.