

Jeffrey Pinyan's Response to "7 Steps to a More Robust Liturgy"

Introductory Notes

What makes our celebration of the liturgy "robust"? Can the Roman Rite be celebrated in such a way that one could describe it as "bold, dramatic, rich, deeply expressive, [and] highly energizing," the same words used in *7 Steps to a More Robust Liturgy* to describe the rituals displayed at the Polynesian Cultural Center in Hawaii? I think it can, although Roman (Catholic) "drama" does not look the same as Polynesian "drama", and that which is "bold" in the Roman Rite may not look "bold" in a Polynesian ritual.

Before we consider how our liturgical rites can have a more bold or robust expression by adding touches or flairs to them, we should consider whether we are celebrating the rites wholly or not, and whether we understand the multivalent meanings behind the symbols of our rites. To do the former without considering the latter is akin to shaping a pizza pie out of a wad of dough but stretching it too thin so that tears or holes form, and then covering up the defects by piling on extra toppings: this will not correct the defects, and the thin pizza crust may not even be able to support these toppings. A smaller, thicker, more integral pie would be able to support toppings better.

To transfer that pizza analogy to the realm of the liturgy: a poorly-celebrated liturgy does not need more trappings and additions to become a robust liturgy, it needs to become a properly-celebrated liturgy first, with robustness coming with and through that, provided there is catechesis. (We must not forget that liturgical participants are as much a part of the liturgy as the rites themselves. A symbol does not exist for its own sake.) A poorly-celebrated liturgy with an artificial "robustness" is a false high, and disappointment will set in when the non-robust additions are not employed. The properly-formed participants of a properly-celebrated liturgy will be better able to discern the value of proposed additions and how best to support them, if at all.

One issue that the author addresses in his introduction but does not treat again later is the way in which prayers are said at Mass. I agree with him that too often these liturgical texts are simply read or recited, rather than actually proclaimed. This is a loss of integrity in the rite: one does not *say* a prayer, one *prays* a prayer. The same can be said about the readings from Scripture as well. But I do not think the solution is to be "dramatic" with these texts; "dramatic" implies "theatrical," and Catholic liturgy in general (and the older Roman Rite in particular) has often been criticized as being too theatrical. Instead, my solution – which is one I put into practice whenever I lector at Mass – is to treat each text as its form requires; I do not read "dramatically," but according to the nature of what has been written. I read prophecies as prophecies being announced now, letters as letters addressed to the congregation before me, narratives as stories, and psalms as prayers. This is not theater, this is reality. I do no need to inject drama; there is already emotion in these words when they are read in the same Spirit in which they were written.

I now turn my attention to the author's seven steps.

1. The Entrance Procession

A procession may be, as the author states, a spectacle, but some of his recommendations seem to emphasize the spectacle over the procession in which they occur: does the Mass begin with a spectacle that happens to be advancing up the aisle, or does it begin with a procession to the sanctuary that catches the eye and focuses the soul?

Getting the people's attention

Alerting the congregation to the procession is done in some parishes by a cantor welcoming the people, informing them of the hymn, and asking them to stand and join in the singing. In other parishes, like my own, an altar server simply rings a bell, and the people all know to stand and sing. A bell, rather than a drum, seems the more traditional "Roman" instrument for signaling people to attention. It may not have the drama or passion or (secular) appeal of a drum, but it is recognizable and sober and effective. The suggestions concerning the use of drumming through the article seem unnecessarily tribal to me; again, Roman robustness needn't be achieved by the same means as Polynesian robustness.

Another effective "call to worship" for a Catholic setting could be borrowed from elsewhere in our liturgical tradition, the Liturgy of the Hours. The cantor could begin the invitation, "O Lord, open my lips...", and the congregation would know (by catechesis, of course) to stand and respond, "and my mouth shall proclaim your praise." That would lead directly into the singing of the entrance hymn.

The Book of the Gospels

A deacon (or in his absence, a lector) may carry the Book of the Gospels in the entrance procession. It should be held up ("slightly elevated", GIRM 120) so that it can be seen. But if this is the case, why should the deacon interrupt the movement of the procession to turn around and show the Book of the Gospels to everyone once again, shortly before placing it on the altar, presumably in everyone's sight? This seems to me to be an exaggerated emphasis on the congregation seeing the Book, and on the congregation in particular – and I say this as one who is usually in the congregation and not in the procession. This extended showing of the Book of the Gospels is more appropriate at the procession to the ambo for the Gospel.

A robust entrance procession

I have favored the term "entrance" (entrance procession, entrance hymn) over "opening" for the reason of clarity. The entrance procession is what its name implies: a procession (from the Latin *pro-* + *cedere* = "to go towards") and an entrance (into the sanctuary, by the priest and ministers; perhaps more generally, into the celebration of the liturgy). I think "opening procession" is too vague a term, much like using "opening prayer" instead of "Collect".

This precision in language helps to point out what the purpose and focus of the entrance procession should be. It is fundamentally movement from one place (the doors of the church, presumably) to another (the sanctuary).

Here is how I would recommend carrying out the entrance procession in a more robust manner.

Note: the underlying principle for all my remarks is to try and see a purpose for everything that we are already doing (or supposed to be doing) in the liturgy. Let's correct (inform and reform) ourselves before we try to correct (reform) the liturgy.

The Mass begins with a procession, rather than with everyone already "in their places." This means that the very act of moving from one place to another – the state of departing, the state of transitioning, the state of arriving, and the very steps being taken – has meaning to the liturgy, and therefore to those who participate in it. As with many things in the liturgy, there are numerous layers of symbolism in the entrance procession, but at its core it evokes the theme of "journey": Abram's journey from lands familiar to lands unknown at the bidding of God, the exodus of the Israelites out of Egypt, to name two Old Testament examples; the lonely walk of the Samaritan woman in the noonday sun to Jacob's well where she met Jesus, His final entrance into Jerusalem, the *via dolorosa* of His Passion, His ascension into Heaven, and the pilgrimage of the Church on earth, to name a few New Testament examples.

I suspect there is a "walking" theme (hidden or in plain sight) for every liturgical day or season of the year, but I tend to focus on two themes: that of our Lord entering Jerusalem (part of a model that interprets the whole Mass as re-presenting Palm Sunday through Pentecost) and that of our earthly pilgrimage to Heaven. In this second theme, Christ is our goal (the altar), our Pioneer who leads the way (the crucifix at the head of the procession), and the Good Shepherd watching His flock from behind so as not to let any go missing (the priest). But whatever theme you settle on, understanding the *why* of the procession is integral to the aspects of *how*.

Disabilities aside, the minister process to the sanctuary by walking, by taking steps (as opposed to standing idly on a moving platform like one sees at an airport). Our steps on the journey should be deliberate and careful and directed toward their goal; likewise, the ministers' steps should be slow, steady, and deliberate. Psalm verses such as 17:5, 119:59, or 119:105 come to mind; if God's word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, all the more reason for the Book of the Gospels to be a part of the procession. The people in the procession should of course pay attention to their steps and their pace; this needn't require a dramatic 15 or 20 foot space between ministers.

Finally, the focus of the procession should be the arrival at the sanctuary, which entails the ministers showing reverence to the altar and arriving at their places. The procession and hymn are not about greeting the priest or the ministers or the congregation; that takes place when the priest greets the people (*Roman Missal*, rubric 2).

2. Silence

There are moments during the Mass where silence is prescribed or recommended. The purpose of the silence depends on the moment: recollection, meditation, prayer, praise.

I agree with the author's recommendation that after "Let us pray" is spoken by the priest, there should be silence so that everyone *can* pray before the priest gives voice to their prayers through the liturgical text. Silences during the Liturgy of the Word are also important, so that people have a moment to think about the Word they have received.

Silence during the Prayer of the Faithful can achieve the same result as the silence after "Let us pray." The petitions which make up the Prayer of the Faithful should really be the petitions of the congregation and not only of the one reading them. By this I mean that we must listen to these prayers and make them our own, so that when we say "Lord, hear our prayer" (or whatever the response is) we can be speaking truthfully. One way to do this would be to incorporate the model of the Good Friday prayers: allowing for a moment of silence after each intention ("... Let us pray to the Lord. [silent prayer] Lord, hear us." "Lord, hear our prayer."), or introducing each petition first and having a moment for silent prayer before "collecting" those silent prayers in the words of the petition, much like the Collect.

Silences and pauses in the Creed are more easily accomplished (and less contrived) when the Creed is sung; this enables everyone to speak (aloud) and pray (silently) with the same "tempo" as their neighbors.

Silence, like words or actions, can become perfunctory. Robust silence is not measured by frequency or length so much as by what fills it. We must put the periods of silence foreseen by the Missal to better use; the last thing we want is for participants in the liturgy to be spending time in silence grumbling to themselves, "What are they waiting for?", or wondering who has forgotten what comes next!

3. The Gospel Procession

The movement from the chair to the ambo for the reading of the Gospel is a procession in its own right, although it is generally the one least treated like a procession. The author's recommendation for candle-bearers to accompany the priest or deacon as he collects the Book of the Gospels and carries it to the ambo is a fine one, suggested by the GIRM as well.

But the Book of Gospels belongs on the altar, not on a stand elsewhere in the church, as the author recommends. The connection between the "table of the Word" and the "table of the Eucharist," between the inscribed Word and the incarnate Word, is too important to pass up. Depending where the Book is placed, it may be a distraction for some for whom it is not in their line of sight to the sanctuary; or it may result in an abnormal entrance procession, if the Book is placed on its stand halfway through the procession, or if the stand is not along the standard path of the procession.

There seems little need for a drum when there are other cues (verbal and aural) for the procession. Introducing the momentary sound of drumming artificially increases the number of silences, silence that would have existed anyway without being interrupted.

In the older Roman Rite, the "procession" involved moving the Missal from one end of the altar to the other, so that the Gospel could be "preached to the north." In the modern Roman Rite, the Gospel procession might not be perceived to have a symbolic value; it might seem merely functional. But it can represent the incarnating of the Word, the movement from Heaven (the altar) to earth (the ambo). It can represent the desire of the people in Jesus' day to follow Him wherever He went and to listen to His teaching. The reception of these signs can be heightened without adding to the liturgy, by making use of the sensory aids (candles and incense) already at our disposal.

4. The Presentation of the Gifts

Generosity and stewardship are at the core of the Presentation of the Gifts: generosity, first on God's part, because it is through His goodness that we have the bread, wine, and other gifts which we offer back to Him; second on our part, because we are moved by God's generosity to be generous ourselves; and stewardship, because we must be responsible caretakers of what God has given us, avoiding wasteful misuse so that there will be something to offer back to Him in thanksgiving, and so that those who need the gifts which God has given us can receive them.

The Presentation of the Gifts is the perfect moment to demonstrate these two qualities, but in some parishes the connection between the bread and wine and the congregation's other gifts is lost. A parish I know of processes the bread and wine first, and then takes up a collection while the priest and deacon continue with the Offertory prayers; this completely dissociates the monetary gifts of the parishioners from the bread and wine, lamentably so.

Some parishes have bins or boxes for donations of food and clothing, but their use is not connected to the offerings made at the Presentation of the Gifts. The author's suggestion of encouraging such donations at this time is very good. I am not sure of the feasibility of the author's suggestion to have parishioners leave their seats to make their contributions. If this were to be done, it would be best done as a row-by-row procession. The link between leaving one's seat and "active participation in the liturgy" is not, in my opinion, a helpful one, because "active" liturgical participation is less about external "activity" and more about complete (external *and* internal) participation in the "action" of the Mass.

The suggestion for drumming to be used in place of other music (e.g. an offertory hymn) seems unnecessary.

5. Music

In his introductory material, the author noted that most parishioners would not want to listen to the music used in their parishes as they drove to work or worked out in a gym. I do not see this necessarily as a bad thing. While he is correct that a lot of our music is "wimpy and bland," I do not think that is the primary reason it is not found on our CDs and iPods.

I choose the music I listen to in my car or while working out because of the immediate purpose it serves, which, more often than not, is not really the same immediate purpose as the liturgy. Yes, I wish to draw closer to God and to my neighbor in all things, but I don't need to tap out the baseline on the pew in front of me, and I don't need a steady beat to get my heart-rate rising at Mass. Liturgical music (which should mean more than simply "music used during a liturgy") may be compared with genres of music, but I do not think it serves it well to compare it with other environments: the car, the gym, the dinner party, the romantic evening.

His suggestions for robust music include drums (a "dramatic" and "primal" instrument), solos (instrumental and vocal), chants (e.g. Taizé and African), black hymnody, and a cappella singing.

Without trying to sound like a dualist, I think drums can sometimes speak to the baser core of the human person, exciting the wrong sorts of passions during the liturgy. I would prefer to avoid the use of drums in the liturgy.

The suggestion of a solo musical reflection after the homily seems out of place: individual silent reflection is the proper response at this time.

The use of foreign languages in music (particularly in chants) is laudable, and I am in favor of "expressing our catholicity" in this way, so long as we also respect the use, from time to time, of that tongue which is foreign to all of us and yet part of our liturgical heritage, Latin.

The unaccompanied human voice is "the music proper to the Church" (Pius X, *Tra la sollecitudini* 15), and I have personally heard unexpected (to me) cappella used to excellent effect. I would not say it was "dramatic" but it was certainly moving.

6. The Rite of Sprinkling

I have little comment here. It would be nice to see the Rite of Sprinkling used more often than it currently is, so long as the Penitential Act (which it replaces) does not suffer for it.

The one suggestion of the author's that I find curious is the use of additional (lay) ministers for the act of sprinkling. While laypeople may bless themselves with holy water, and may in certain circumstances sprinkle others with holy water (during the blessing of a new home in the *Book of Blessings*, in the absence of a priest or deacon), the liturgical sprinkling is done with an ordained minister present. The Roman Missal (Appendix II, rubric 4) directs the priest to do the sprinkling himself.

7. Altar Bread

The author writes that many of the signs, symbols, and rituals of the sacraments are "somewhat exotic." I think that could be said of the unusual type of bread used in most parishes, which "do[es] not resemble any kind of bread that we eat in daily life," the thin round wafer.

That said, I am not against the use of properly prepared, non-commercial altar bread; the sign value of the bread actually being the "work of human hands" (as the Offertory prayer says it is) is powerful, and it can be quite a personal joy to know that the bread you baked has been changed into the sacrament of our Lord's Body and Blood.

A more "robust" altar bread can present problems at the Fraction Rite; we must take care not to make a mess when dividing the consecrated bread. The author's recommendation for the communion procession to begin during the Fraction while the Lamb of God is being sung seems out of place to me. First, it poses a problem if the parish is in a diocese where the posture after the Lamb of God is kneeling; second, it draws attention away from the action at the altar and can be a distraction.

I am curious why the author does not consider the more robust altar breads to be preferable for bringing to the sick or homebound or for reservation in the tabernacle.

Conclusion

The author closes his introduction by saying "we don't need to change the liturgy; all of the elements are there." I agree, but many of his suggestions are in fact changing the liturgy, even if only in small details: for example, the introduction of musical interludes and the moving of the Book of the Gospels outside the sanctuary. My interpretation of revisiting our approach to the liturgy is quite different from his. I do not think the liturgy needs to be filled with drums and banners and 15-20 foot gaps in processions: I think it needs to be filled with its own meaning first, and we do too.