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SUMMER 2009 COLLECTION

Speaking the Call to Ministry to One Another

*A re-visioning of the Chrism Mass Holy Week liturgy,
with bishop, clergy, and laypeople.*

*Where might we go with the Maundy Thursday Chrism Mass
and Reaffirmation of Ordination Vows?*

Donald Schell writes of twenty-five years experience of the 'Chrism Mass' and Renewal of Ordination Vows in Holy Week, valuing the experience for its collegiality and but also wondering how diocesan and cathedral liturgies for this event, shaped when the 1979 Prayer Book was new, could be reframed to give clergy and laity in Holy Week opportunity to celebrate and nurture their shared call to service and the servanthood in friendship that Christ commands in John's Gospel.



by Donald Schell

First, some history for which I'm seeking confirmation and elaboration from those who are more expert in the historical dimensions of our recent liturgical reform. Here's what I think is the foundation of our annual Maundy Thursday (or Tuesday) "Chrism Mass."

The liturgy many of our dioceses now celebrate is a BCP (Book of Common Prayer) adaptation of a Vatican II Roman practice. In the Roman setting immediately after Vatican II, there was a pressing need to help priests re-conceive their commitment to one another in a way more collegial than "my priesthood", and to their bishop (whose leadership implementing controversial Vatican II reforms needed support). Also, the annual Chrism and reaffirmation of ordination vows offered an occasion to loosen priests' attachment to their old "pre-Vatican II" obligation to "say mass" daily. After Vatican II, the annual expression of shared priesthood under the bishop's leadership trumped the old obligation and offered an image (and maybe an experience) of something more authentically shared.

To Roman Catholics, "Holy Thursday" seemed like an obvious choice to accomplish this shift, because of their tradition that the disciples were ordained (and received their authority as bishops) at Jesus' hand at the Last Supper. So, gathered before the apostles' successor among us - their bishop - presbyters renew their vows to serve in extension of his apostolic ministry.

I have attended and participated in Chrism Masses on Maundy Thursday (and more recently on Tuesday in Holy Week) since about 1980. To my knowledge there wasn't a Chrism Mass in any of the three dioceses in which I worked before then. I'm guessing 1980 may have been when various dioceses, in the implementation of the 1979 BCP and the renewed Holy Week, borrowed and fused parts of the Roman practice, with text from the 1979 Book.

Here's what I've seen in almost thirty years of this liturgy: Clergy and lay people gather for this service because it's a public liturgy in Holy Week. Though the laity who regularly attend weekday cathedral liturgies are present, the liturgy appears to ignore them. An annual congregation of clergy displaces lay "regulars" in a liturgy shaped with little attention to laity's presence or experience.

The regular elements I've seen include:

- Entrance procession (bishop attended by diocesan and cathedral clergy)
- Ministry of the word (lay readers, 2 lessons with a psalm in between, Gospel read by vocational deacon)
- Sermon by the bishop
- Reaffirmation of ordination vows – priests and deacons standing, then with bishop seated. (The laity are also seated, but with a different symbolic import. The bishop is seated in the *cathedra* to receive renewed vows. The laity are simply witnessing a rite that doesn't include them).
- Bishop's rededicating and reaffirming the bishop's own ordination promises (standing) and Clergy and bishop offering unison prayer for grace and power to perform in accordance with the vows.
- Prayers of the People
- Simple offertory (no collection of money)
- Eucharistic prayer (bishop presiding) deacon and a couple of priests standing with the bishop at the table.
- Lord's Prayer (clergy and lay participants in the nave asked to hold hands)
- Fraction
- Communion at stations just outside the altar rails.
- Postcommunion prayer



Bishop consecrating chrism and blessing oil of the sick
A final hymn

Deacon: "Bow down before the Lord"

Bishop standing to bless a kneeling congregation

Dismissal

In our diocese, the event has concluded with an outdoor lunch on the cathedral close for gathered clergy (all as guests of the diocese).

I've enjoyed this gathering a great deal over many years. The power of the event was in the gathering of colleagues: clergy choosing to spend time together with each other and with our bishop.

The core of the liturgy is a repetition of ordination promises, an annual reaffirmation of a personal commitment, similar to a renewal of marriage vows. In several years, I've seen one friend or another (and once myself) in a vocational "stuck

place" or "bind". In those times I've wondered how we could support one another by speaking the call to ministry to each other – even as we're listening and waiting for the Spirit to whisper it to us in a still small voice? And how do we celebrate God's calling us all, each one, ordained or not? When we're honest about ministry, the liturgy celebrating and giving thanks for it must include lay people in their called work, and must touch clergy colleagues who are between parishes or unable to find church work. Unless we speak and enact calling to one another, all we have is a stubborn commitment to a ministry some are still struggling to discern, or haven't heard the church asking of them, and for others, fear is no longer there.

I see two problems with our typical synthesis of the Book of Occasional Services, the 1979 BCP, and post-Vatican II Roman Catholic practices:

1. What actually sustains and enlivens us in ministry is *not* our insistent renewal of personal commitment, but a fresh experience of church and Spirit calling us.
2. The convergence of symbols and actions in the liturgy in which we are now engaged portrays ministry in a frame that contradicts Baptismal ministry – it's old-Roman style hierarchical, where the bishop can speak of the ministry as "mine in this place." Others' ministry derives from the bishop's sacramental

authority and official power rather than growing collegially among bishop, presbyters, deacons and laity (with the bishop at the center and seeing to good order).

One part of the liturgy has felt painful (or at least very awkward) since the first time I experienced it – laypeople were present as though this celebration of the church’s ministry had nothing to do with them at all. When the ordained are instructed to stand for the reaffirmation of ordination vows, laypeople seated among us seem (and look) lost as if they’d shown up at a party to which they weren’t invited.

For the sake of starting a real conversation and making something both new and more deeply rooted in the Church’s original sense of shared ministry, here are some ideas of a different kind of Holy Week celebration of shared ministry under a bishop’s encouraging oversight:

1. Gather everyone, whether or not ordained, at the font, wash us again in baptismal waters (no vows – focus on the action) and then bishop lead us *all* together into choir seating, facing one another so we all (ordained and not) can let others use our faces as icons for prayer.
2. Deacons marshall and invite participation of entire people of God (rather than simply holding “their” role), visibly escorting readers to lectern, overseeing a shared reading of the Gospel (such as the Passion reading). Give the *whole* people the voice of Christ in the reading.
3. Sermon by a cleric or lay person (perhaps alternating by years)
4. Prayers of the People marshaled by deacons, with voices from every ordained order and the laity.
5. Eucharistic Prayer, divided among three or four presiders (bishop could be one).
6. Bishop blesses oils
7. Footwashing (everyone washing someone’s feet and everyone having someone wash their feet). Use of oils to anoint the feet?
8. Lunch afterwards, inviting all present (including lay participants). Invitation to people to tell one another over lunch what they count on for one another in ministry (explicit, simple expression of the call that shapes each one of us).

What might such a change in practice accomplish?

- it acknowledges that the ground of ministry is all of our service to one another and to the stranger among us.

- it welcomes the bishop’s leadership in true *episcopos* (a visionary seeing of the whole, the one whose seeing helps us all know that God sees us.).
- in a celebration of ministry, it embodies that the bishop is most God-like when silent (Ignatius of Antioch).
- it puts us face to face with one another.
- it joins our several authentic ministries in counterpoint
- it offers prayers, experience, and models an enactment of service to one another in Holy Week, taking us all (ordained or not) into Jesus’ command to love one another and follow his example of leadership in humble service to one another and to his world.

I offer this sketch of what we’re doing (elements of the liturgy) for others to add what they’ve seen, and comment (as I’ve done here) on the shape and feeling of the liturgy we’re already doing. I also hope questions and ideas here may provoke some re-thinking and fresh approaches to a liturgy celebrating, giving thanks for, and asking God’s blessing on the ministry and service we share.

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Council of APLM

We are a network of Anglicans in North America, established in 1946 to promote liturgical renewal in the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada. We also work ecumenically for the renewal of worship and mission in other churches. We develop and promote church practices joining the mission of the church and the regular gathering of the church community for worship so that liturgy shapes, defines, and empowers mission and mission liturgy.

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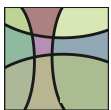
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