Opinion



by NCR Staff

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Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese has written two columns recently about liturgical reform. In his first column, Reese has advice for the Italian bishop who was asked by Pope Francis to complete a visitation of the Congregation for the Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, which oversees liturgy for the church. In a second column, Reese offers his own ideas on improving liturgy as an attempt to get the conversation going, inviting liturgical scholars and others to consider his proposals. Many NCR readers reached out with their own ideas on how to reform Catholic liturgy. Responses have been edited for length and clarity.

Start by changing and making the opening prayer, offertory prayer and concluding prayer more intelligible and conform to modern day language of the people. And in those prayers eliminate the word "merit." We do not merit the love of God, heaven or the kingdom. They are gifts.

In Eucharistic prayers, "we" refers to the community or the people of God or the faithful people of God, so why not replace the "we" to make the idea of inclusivity pertinent to the faithful people of God attending that Mass.

Eliminate the line that includes "bishops, priests and deacons" and include them in the general term of "the faithful" indicating inclusivity and that they are one with the entire faith community, not above them, or different than they are.

Instead of using the pronoun "he" for Jesus, change the pronoun to the noun and strengthen the role of Jesus and his involvement in the sacrifice. And in some instances, call him "brother Jesus." It's beautiful to hear him being called brother Jesus. There are places in which those two words are a perfect fit.

In the preface, eliminate the phrase "our duty and our salvation" and replace it with "our joy and privilege." The words "we pray" are used. Replace with "this community" or "our community." It is so much more personal and applicable.

Older people find it difficult to be alert at Mass if it is beyond an hour in length. Indicating to presiders that they can shorten the service, especially for those in long-term care facilities, may be advisable to mention as a rubric or notation.

(Fr.) ED DEBONO, OFM Conv.

Kingston, Ontario



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Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese failed to mention the most important changes that should happen for liturgical reform: ordaining women deacons and priests and allowing priests to be married. I am not familiar with the 1998 English translation of the Mass, but I surely hope that it uses inclusive language for God and humans.

Also, could not God be called "mother" somewhere in the Mass? At the very least, the pronoun "him" should not be used for God, who is both father and mother. Could not women be allowed to preach while we are waiting for the church to allow them to be ordained? Could not priests be encouraged to use feminine and inclusive names for God in homilies and announcements while we are waiting for changes in the Mass?

I have waited all my life for these changes, and they have not happened yet.

LOUISE T. CUNHA

Stuart, Florida

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As a (now retired) Catholic hospital chaplain, the reform that resonated with me most was to allow persons other than a priest to administer the Sacrament of the Sick. So many anxious hours were spent trying to find a priest who could be available in an emergency. Not to mention worrying about asking often elderly men to venture out in the middle of the night or in inclement weather. Or in the middle of

a pandemic.

I suspect a number of patients (or more often families) would still request a priest. And some work-around for the absolution of sins would be required. But distributing the privilege of administering this greatly comforting sacramental presence more widely would, in my opinion, be a literal godsend.

MARGIE HARDEBECK

Covington, Kentucky

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Thanks to Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese for his thoughtful analysis of the impending visitation at the Vatican liturgy office.

I have a small suggestion for the English Roman Missal controversy. By now, there's probably no point in trying to replace the 2011 translation completely. But could an "alternative missal" be authorized, that uses the priest's prayers from the rejected 1998 ICEL translation? The congregation's parts could stay the same to avoid major disruptions; but at least the priest's prayers could be more relatable for many. If a parish can't decide which one, then perhaps each version could be used at specific Mass times.

This might sound crazy, but I believe some Anglican churches do something similar — one version of the Mass has more modern language, the other more traditional.

(Fr.) WILLIAM M. BECKER

Plainview, Minnesota

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I am 81-years-old and rarely have missed a Sunday liturgy. That is only to say that I have a wide-ranging experience with Sunday liturgy over the past 75 years. The last couple of decades have given me a radically different view of what it means to pray, to know God in my life and to visualize what a meaningful liturgy might look like.

During the course of my wife's 15-year decline and death from Alzheimer's, I had to find a way to cope with the pain and disorientation with which my life confronted me. Thankfully, a friend introduced me to meditation and centering prayer. This practice plus spiritual reading led me to finally grasp the meaning of the life of the Spirit within!

I can't speak for others, but I have become so sensitive to the disconnect between what is emphasized in liturgy and my personal experience that I often wonder why I keep attending. The answer so far is that my need for community outweighs the unhelpful message. Younger generations are not as patient and, as we know, are dropping out.

We should stop begging for favors from God and emphasize our gratitude for all that is given from every comfort and blessing to the presence of the Spirit of infinite love that is God's life within. Liturgy should be overwhelmingly the language of gratitude, not pleading for what has already been given.

MIKE RICCI, SR.

Rosemount, Minnesota

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An example of successful liturgical reform can be observed at the Church of the Nativity which is located in Timonium-Lutherville, Maryland. Nativity is in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Maryland.

In the meaningful revision of liturgical song and responses, Fr. Michael White has generated a liturgy that has brought people back to the church, in from other parishes, and returned a number of those from other denominations as well as those that had been de-churched (not affiliated with anything to do with a church).

The result was that White had to build a church to accommodate the influx of congregants where other Roman Catholic Churches in the Baltimore area and in Maryland were being closed and parishes are being merged due to lack of attendance and diminishment of support.

The history of Church of the Nativity will provide many ideas for liturgical thought. They are making disciples — fulfilling the mission statement that Jesus gave us.

HENRI HOOVER

Glen Burnie, Maryland

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The topic is, in my view, of the utmost importance for a badly needed renewal of the church. For a majority of Catholics, the liturgy is the only contact they have with the church and we know all too well the deplorable effects that poor liturgy can have on how Christians understand their belonging to the body of Christ.

We should all pray that the visitation requested by Pope Francis ends up with a full and authentic evaluation of the liturgy. Let us hope first that inculturation be taken seriously. And, in my view, the promotion of high-quality texts (from theological, poetic and pastoral points of view) should be a primary concern.

Your suggestion about the "kiss" of peace (or whatever will substitute for "kiss" in a post-pandemic liturgy) is most welcome. Currently, there is a deplorable overlap with the singing of the Agnus Dei, even at St. Peter of Rome. Many people involved in the liturgy think that the Agnus Dei is the musical accompaniment of the kiss of peace, which it is not, even if it ends with "grant us peace."

Let us all pray for a real revitalization of the liturgy. If we want our children to stay faithful to the church, this is absolutely essential.

PAUL CADRIN

Montréal, Quebec

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I agree wholeheartedly with the opinions of Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese on liturgical reform. I particularly agree with his comment on the Eucharistic Prayer.

In about 1992, while leading a contemporary music group in the front (side) of the church I kneeled during the prayer and consciously tried to appear attentive (while I thought about the next musical piece). It then occurred to me that perhaps I really

should listen to the prayer as I hadn't for 10 years. Wow. I was stunned at the beauty and profundity of the prayer and to this day I listen and internalize the words.

The prayer is important and its significance should be "retaught."

DAN BERGEN

Painesville, Ohio

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I'm confused about the procedures listed for liturgical reform. The article starts by asking what we would say but the plan outlined does not seem to include laypeople or most unordained people or most women. We are the people who sit in the pews!

The most recent "reform" led to "strict translations" which gave us terms like "consubstantial." With most of the churches closed during the pandemic, people have found other ways of meeting and praying. Some have zoomed in to Masses far from their homes, others have joined with groups that draw from around the world, and others have created their own liturgies. Still others have founded house churches (on zoom) that seem to harken back to Paul's churches. Most of these gatherings have room for people to share their thoughts on the readings, and some encourage input on the service from those participating.

I think I will have to wait a long time before a priest after the readings would say: If you would like to share your thoughts, please raise your hand and unmute yourself.

SUELLEN K. TOZZI

New Rochelle, New York

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I am a resigned married priest now retired with degrees in philosophy, theology, a master's in adult Christian community development and a PhD in the management of the non-profit organization. I have been faithful to the baptismal call and have tried for more than 40 years to be a positive influence as a member of the local Christian community and regard my present state (vocation) as a gift that came about through a call by the Spirit of Christ.

Reese is spot on when he suggests that Catholic liturgical reform is long overdue. The renewed understanding of the Eucharist is what I wish to address. The current Eucharistic liturgy draws its influence on a cosmic story that is derived from an understanding of humanity that is derived from a literal interpretation of the Scriptures. As such I wonder if his suggestion that "eucharistic prayers that use more biblical language" would work. In this I am open to the suggestions of scripture scholars.

We badly need to understand and experience this transformation of the community into the body of Christ so that we can live out the covenant with God through Christ with an understanding that God (divinity, the creator) from the beginning has willed to co-participate with humanity in the evolution of a new creation.

This has huge implications on how we view ourselves as humans. God has chosen to join with us in this unique venture of creating "a new heaven and a new earth." If we accept the offer, we receive the energy (grace) to participate and the world with us will be transformed.

This transformation has already begun and is underway. When the community gathers as the body of Christ, it recognizes the work of the Spirit of Christ already underway; world poverty is shrinking, giant strides are being made in health research, AI is addressing work drudgery, gender equality is being recognized, racial diversity is happening, respect is growing in the workplace and climate change is gaining momentum; there is much to celebrate and so much yet to do.

It is time to create liturgies that celebrate all this: that we are the hands and feet of the body of Christ.

CHARLES FRANCIS (FRANK) FOLZ

Wasaga Beach, Ontario

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