

Grace Upon Grace: Living Water

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Two months ago, on February 22, a Lutheran pastor and his wife, both faithful and fruitful servants of our Lord, began their personal celebration of “the feast of victory for our God.” They now chant with the saints and all the heavenly host. “Worthy is Christ the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God.” It would only be just if the choir director had chosen that hymn of praise to be sung by the choir that day, because the two I speak of were the Rev. Herbert and Ruth Lindemann. Pastor Lindemann left at least two great monuments to his passion for his Lord, this Institute of Liturgical Studies and the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. They also left us memories of a gracious, cultured way of life controlled by an abiding love of the Church and her worship.

Herb and Ruth were both enriched and impoverished by that devotion. They found in the Church’s worship the beacon and mooring point for their lives. But they also suffered from the general prejudice the Lutheran Church has had at times against persons who were, in the inaccurate rhetoric of fifty years ago, “high church.” Honor and preferment came seldom to those known as “liturgical.” But Herb and Ruth, fully aware of this, seemed more bemused than bitter.

My own first contact with Herb came shortly after my arrival at Valparaiso University upon my appointment as secretary, and then director, of the Institute of Liturgical Studies. He had been chair of the Institute as it made a transition from being the conference of the Liturgical Society of St. James into an Institute of this University. He presided at the annual conferences with gentleness and magisterial calm. His chairmanship covered the years when liturgical sensitivity changed somewhat from being perceived as a churchly distortion into something that might be considered an essential concern of the Lutheran churches in Canada and the United States.

At times when there was subtle and not so subtle persecution, the Institute under Herb provided a place for Christian men and women to meet under friendly auspices. The University setting provided legitimization for a point of view that was suspect. After all, who in his or her right mind would want to celebrate the Holy Eucharist each Lord’s Day? Out of the question, obviously. But the Institute provided strengthening and spiritual and intellectual food for those who had such strange notions. When the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LC-MS) seemed intent on devouring itself some years ago, the Institute under Herb provided what was at times the only place where the battered could find Christian fellowship and acceptance.

When, to perhaps even its own amazement, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, extended an invitation to the other Lutheran bodies of

North America to work together on a joint Lutheran service book, it seemed only natural for many of us that Herb became chair of the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship. That body produced the church-altering *Lutheran Book of Worship* which was supposed to unite the Lutheran churches of North America in their worship. It was one of Herb's great sorrows that the LC-MS experienced a monumental sea change during the process and later rejected the *Lutheran Book of Worship* for reasons of church politics. However, Herb had served well as chair of the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship and as a member of the Liturgical Texts Committee. His scholarship and catholic spirit are stamped all over that book.

Through the Institute and the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, Herb contributed to the major shift in Lutheran worship and piety that has taken place in the last fifty years. As Lutheranism changed from a church that used Reformed orders of worship to a church that recognized its service books as great resources, from a church that celebrated Holy Eucharist four times a year to one that has congregations that celebrate it weekly, from a church that scarcely knew what to do with Holy Baptism to one that now finds itself discussing Baptism in the context of the historic Catechumenate, from a Church that had never heard of the Easter Vigil to one that talks of paschal mystagogy, we have seen a great change in stance and substance. The process is far from complete. Dangers still lurk about us, but things are infinitely more in accord with our convictions than they were fifty years ago.

That change corresponds in a surprising way to the measure of Herb's ministry. Much credit and thanks are to be given to Herb. He was a worker in a field that is not yet ready for the full harvest. As evidence of this, this year the Institute of Liturgical Studies is gathered to continue that work in one particular area, that of Christian initiation, which is the beginning of all things. We have just begun to understand what it means to confess that Baptism is "Grace upon Grace." We need to rediscover the many ways in which baptismal water is not simply water but "Living Water."

I. Pastor Lindemann was a significant figure in what we call the Liturgical Movement in the Lutheran church in America. That movement, as we all know, had its most significant beginning about 150 years ago in the Roman Catholic Church but soon found sympathizers in other denominations, including Lutheranism. In that denomination it was linked with a rediscovery of Luther and the Confessions, to its benefit.

In American Lutheranism the movement made a great contribution by restoring to the church its historic liturgy for the Holy Eucharist, notably in the *Common Service Book* issued toward the close of the last century. With this recovery went a desire to restore the ancient tradition of a weekly celebration of the Holy Eucharist. This was in accord with the wish of Blessed Martin Luther, who was not interested in settling into the Zwinglian pattern of a quarterly Communion, even though in time many Lutherans did adopt that despairing pattern.

In the course of the lifetime of many Institute participants, the Lutheran practice slowly changed from a quarterly to a monthly to a weekly pattern. That change is, as we all know too well, not complete, but for Lutherans the first three quarters of this century saw a significant change in Lutheran practice. We may rejoice in that change.

It is not likely that we shall ever revert to the old pattern, although some of the same faulty arguments against the weekly Communion can still be heard offered by some who see them as obvious truth. I have never gotten even a smile from other pastors who argue that too-frequent communion breeds contempt for the Sacrament when I comment, "Well then, why don't you stop preaching three out of four Sundays for the same reason?" Isn't there already more contempt for preaching than there could ever be for the Holy Communion? For some unfathomable reason, Lutheran clergy have more confidence in their own preaching work than they have in God's work in the Sacrament. We may not be as grace-centered as we might be.

We can say that for roughly the first two-thirds of this century, the Church was busy recovering the Sacrament of the Altar. For some denominations this has meant restoring the Eucharist to the place of the chief service of the day so that people would have the opportunity of receiving the sacrament. This is becoming true not only of the Lutheran churches but of denominations, such as, for example, the United Methodist Church, which we have not been accustomed to think of as "liturgical," as we used to say. For some denominations that have always celebrated a weekly Eucharist, such as the Roman Catholic Church, it has meant encouraging reception of what was always there but without much encouragement being given for the people to participate. At one time Roman Catholic Christians tended to be very faithful in sharing what we now have learned to call the Sacrament of Reconciliation and were obliged to commune but once a year at Easter time. Now they tend to come to participate in the Communion but to neglect the baptismal Sacrament of Confession. So much has changed that I've heard one Roman Catholic liturgist sorrowfully ask if anything has been bettered by the change.

While this ferment over the Sacrament of the Altar was taking place, attention slowly became fixed on what was called "Baptismal reform." For all churches this meant a reexploration of traditional baptismal theology and liturgy. For those churches that practice infant baptism, especially state churches, this also led to questions being raised about the practice of baptizing every child presented at the font, whether or not the parents were practicing Christians. For churches traditionally opposed to the baptism of the very young, it has meant a cautious reexamination of their practice of rebaptizing those baptized before the age of reason.

Yet another baptismal question was raised in various churches: the question of the relation between Baptism and what we have called Holy Confirmation. Another concern that deals with Holy Baptism has been

fruitful for the churches: namely the celebration of the Holy Triduum, notably the Great Vigil of Easter.

This Institute is not the first devoted to questions associated with Christian Initiation, evidence to the fact that these questions trouble Lutherans as much as others. It is clear we have not come as far in dealing with the complex rites and theology associated with Baptism, Confirmation, and Confession, the last mentioned is for Lutherans also a part of the Christian initiation complex. This is so, if for no other reason than that Luther apparently relinquished his inclination to refer to Confession as a Sacrament because he concluded that Confession might be subsumed under Baptism, since both clearly had to do with the death of the old nature and the rising of the new.

If, as I have suggested, the first two-thirds of the century found us concerned with the recovery of Holy Communion, then we can say that the next major period of our history will be concerned with the recovery of the Sacrament of the Font and the rites and liturgies associated with it. Any date we might suggest as the point of the turn in concern would be arbitrary, but for convenience I will suggest the year 1979 because it was the year of the publication of the *Lutheran Book of Worship*.

II. In all of the controversy that surrounded its publication, including the defection of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and all the theological, liturgical, and denominational finger-pointing, one thing about the *Lutheran Book of Worship* was hardly noticed. For all intents and purposes the *Lutheran Book of Worship* was a sign of this major sea change. The *LBW* represented an end to the attempt merely to reconstruct a Lutheran liturgy based on sixteenth-century models. The Lutheran Church in North America had gained enough confidence to step boldly in a new direction and produce a liturgy broadly based on the entire liturgical tradition of the western church. In the process the controversy about the Eucharistic Prayer and the Offertory was brushed aside as settled. Likewise, the controversy about the weekly Eucharist had been dealt with.

More significant than the treatment of the Eucharistic liturgy was the fact that in *LBW* for the first time Lutherans in North America had chosen to celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Baptism with a rite that also was set free from the quest for a restored sixteenth-century rite and which also laid claim to the fullness of the western tradition. One needs only compare the baptismal rite of *LBW* with the baptismal rites in *The Lutheran Agenda* and in the *Service Book and Hymnal* to see this clearly. There was much greater change between the *Service Book and Hymnal's* baptismal rite and that of the *LBW* than in the change in the Eucharistic rite, for example. Not only was the baptismal rite itself more clearly laying claim to the entire western tradition, but the baptismal significance of Confession, Confirmation, and Burial were highlighted.

Now all this should not be too surprising for Lutherans. It was, after all, Luther who taught us to turn to our baptism when we sought assurance of our salvation. It was Luther whose Reformation began out of a zeal for the baptismal sacrament of Confession. It was Luther who reemphasized the paschal dimension of the Sacrament in the famous Flood Prayer in his baptismal liturgy. It was Luther who reminded us that baptism is to be reenacted daily by daily repentance and renewal. It was Luther who connected life and death by recalling for us that our Baptism is the model of the Christian death. We are accustomed to hearing and reading negative assessments of some of Luther's liturgical work, but he was a theologian of baptism par excellence.

Perhaps those working on the *LBW* were just lucky in that so few noticed what was happening. But, on the other hand, I'd really rather believe that it was by the grace of God that the Lutheran churches in holy innocence were ready and eager for this road of baptismal renewal. One may note that in some respects *Lutheran Worship* followed *LBW* down this path also. I can not tell all of the theological convictions and political realities that make it harder to detect this move to reform in that book. The baptismal rite itself turns a bit more fondly back toward the sixteenth-century than the *LBW* rite, and that may make it seem to some to cast a shadow on the liturgical renewal of Baptism in that book.

To give some of the younger of us that are here a greater sense of the change. I shall tell you of a Baptism that took place just about fifty years ago, give or take a few months. It was my own Baptism. I was an eighth grader when it was discovered that I had never been baptized. This discovery caused some sensation. First of all for my parents, who had never told me about this. Second, to me, since I had assumed I had been safely done and because I was due to be confirmed in a few short weeks. It might well have been embarrassing to my pastor. (I found out just how embarrassing it could be when I discovered in my first parish a man who had been confirmed but never baptized. We worked that out, but I found myself at least a bit confused as to what to do.)

My Baptism took place one afternoon after school. The only pre-baptismal counseling had been the time spent in Catechism class on Luther's four questions. There were neither family or sponsors present. The rite was an abbreviated version of the old *Lutheran Agenda* rite, impoverished as it already was in symbol and sign. Water was poured, just enough, not too much. It was all over in less than five minutes. I was given a certificate and sent home alone. My pastor was a good pastor. I loved him dearly. He was only doing what he knew to do. That was the way it was done in New York at that time in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. He was not alone in this, as I discovered later in my ministry.

Now think of Baptism as we envision it today, as the chief motivation for the Great Vigil of Easter. The biblical imagery of darkness driven out by the Light, death overcome by the life of Christ, slavery to the Enemy

broken by the freedom given the heirs of the King fill the Service of Light. The procession manifests our movement through this world to the next. The Vigil readings pull us into the community of God's chosen people and surround us with the community's story. The Baptism finds the candidates reoriented from unbelief to faith in the Holy Trinity, washed with blessed water, anointed with chrism for their healing, filled with the Holy Spirit and renewed, robed in the garment of Christ for a holy life and enlightened so they may become light in the world. We share then in the manna and life-sustaining waters of the new Passover. And we are sent out into God's world, crying, "Christ is risen. Alleluia! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!"

Now there is a world of difference in these two pictures of baptism illustrated by those two rites. Once we were concerned about minimums, that is, how little one had to do to have a valid Baptism. How little ceremony. How little preparation. How little symbolism. Even how little water. The "how littles" came to us from a peculiar perversion of the Reformation notion that the simpler something was, the purer it was, and the peculiar Latin legal interest in order instead of meaning. "How little" water is needed is a question just barely removed from the obsession over the agent and moment of consecration at the Eucharist that has characterized Western eucharistic theology. Today we are more aware of the subtle nuances of sign and symbol, word and action. We know the rich complexity of human nature and the way our beings cry out for meaning. We do not ask "how little" water but how "*much water*" may better speak to us of the drowning of the old self and at the last minute, gasping rescue from death with the precious gift of gulping breath.

We are fairly well prepared to talk about bread and wine, body and blood, labor and grain and sowing, harvesting and baking, breaking and pouring these days, although admittedly some of us still find it more comfortable to talk about validity and about fencing the table, about transubstantiation and consubstantiation, and about the moment of consecration and the role of the dominical Words of Institution. But we have come a long way.

We now need to learn more about light and oil, immersion and fonts, about storm, flood, and drought, Spirit and fire, and judgment and renewal, so that we can help God's people see the richness and depths of the Sacraments of Initiation. As one can spin a picture of the kingdom of God with eucharistic symbols, so we can do the same with the symbols of Baptism. Our Lord has already done so for us in his own ministry and preaching.

An interesting study can be made of the pericopes for Lent. It is a little bit harder to do it with the lectionary in *LBW* and *LW* than with some other lectionaries because of a felt Lutheran need to emphasize the Passion more during Lent than the Roman Lectionary did, but it can be done, especially if one studies it in the light of the original intent as evidenced in the Roman Lectionary, or as members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in

America will have opportunity to do beginning on the First Sunday in Advent through the *Revised Common Lectionary*. In spite of Lutheran attempts to make of Lent an extended Passiontide, Lent is a time of baptismal renewal, and the pericopes were selected with that in mind.

The Paschal Triduum is clearly the baptismal feast of feasts with its images of the Passover dinner, the passage through the Sea and Jordan, emphasis on death and resurrection, our daily dying and rising, manna and the rock, the Old Testament people of faith, the creation and the flood, and the paschal feast in the New Jerusalem, to mention only some of the vigil images. And these images control our thinking not only for the Triduum but also for the Fifty Great Days from the Triduum to Pentecost.

Lent, as you well know, is the time for initiation into life in Christ and the time for the renewal of our baptism. The Catechumens were enrolled for final preparation early in Lent, certainly in many places on the First Sunday in Lent. Those Christians who enrolled on Ash Wednesday to observe with the Catechumens the season joined them in the disciplines of repentance, prayer, fasting and works of love.

Now look at the pericopes for Lent, especially in Year A. (It should be noted that the Roman Lectionary wisely permits the use of Series A in Years B and C to emphasize the special character of Year A.) On the First Sunday in Lent we hear how our Lord upon his own Baptism is led into the desert to confront the Tempter's challenge to his commitment to servanthood. The candidates and penitents are warned that all temptation is a matter of choosing your own Lord. They are strengthened with the assurance that if sin came into the world by one individual, so salvation came into the world through the one Christ who was tempted as we are.

In the original, that is, Roman, lectionary series, the Second Sunday presents the Transfiguration as a sign of the glory that awaits the Catechumens after the necessary time of testing. The Lutheran Gospel presents Christ's words that we must be born again of water and the Spirit. The two other lessons present the picture of Abram as the model of faith. The Third Sunday is even more clearly baptismal in intent. The Gospel is the story of the woman of Samaria at the well who is taught to drink of the grace-filled living water of life. The Old Testament reading presents the story of the water that flowed from the Rock that restored the people in the wilderness. The Romans reading tells the candidates that today the love of God is poured out in us through the Spirit, who comes in Baptism.

Another biblical image for Baptism is presented on the following Sunday, that of blindness and the gift of sight. The Gospel tells of the man born blind and the use of wet mud to restore his sight. The New Testament reading presents the story of the anointing of the shepherd, David, anointing being yet another image of the gift of the Spirit and the call to service in the Kingdom.

The Fifth Sunday, Lazarus Sunday, demonstrates the return to life that is God's gift to all the baptized. Not even a martyr's death can separate us

from the power of Christ to make all things new. The reading from Romans instructs us that after being baptized in the Spirit, we can no longer live in the flesh but must live by the Spirit. The Ezekiel reading tells of the restoration of the dead nation to life by the word of the Lord, which calls forth the rushing wind. What a marvelous gift this all is as we seek to make Baptism splendid in the lives and hearts of God's people! And this is what we mean by Catechesis, the heart of Lent and the foundation of the church's baptismal teaching and practice.

III. Making Baptism splendid is just what we need to do. It was Ernest Southcott and his concern for baptismal reform in the 1950s and '60s who first made me alert to the possibilities. Southcott was a priest of the Church of England at the time, later to become a bishop and then in turn, I was told, resigned his episcopal office, despairing of the Church's ability to reform itself. He became rather well known because of his reforming spirit, his commitment to the sacramental life, his books, and his parish ministry, which aimed for a thousand house communions a year!

Making Baptism splendid was the purpose of the ILCW. At least that is what it made possible by approving the baptismal liturgy of the *LBW* and its accompanying rites. Making Baptism splendid was one of the reasons why the ILCW recommended the observance of "baptismal festivals," Sundays appointed through the year that are especially appropriate for Baptism, so a number of Baptisms might be celebrated at a given time, encouraging congregations on such occasions to highlight the Sacrament to a greater degree than might otherwise be possible.

Earlier I referred to the dramatic differences between the rites in *The Lutheran Agenda* and the *Service Book and Hymnal* and that of the *LBW*. As chairman of the Baptism sub-committee and drafter of the rite, I intended that we produce a rite firmly in the ecumenical tradition with a rich array of symbolism. It was also intended that there be but one rite of Baptism for adults, young people, and children. This was done so we could begin to imprint on Lutheran consciousness that the model for infant baptism was adult Baptism and not the reverse. This is not a criticism of infant Baptism or a suggestion there is something defective about it. Far from it. But looking at the history of the baptismal rite in our recent past, we can but note that many Lutherans experienced Baptism only through a rite that was significantly stripped down, with relatively little potential for illustrating the fullness of the Church's faith.

Reform of our practice had to begin with a rite that spoke of that fullness. We do not mean less or anything different about infant Baptism than we do about adult Baptism. They have the same meaning, and the rite must make that plain. In this it is better to say more than less. So the rite invites us to celebrate the Sacrament in the context of the Eucharist. The liturgy of the Word serves as the day's catechesis. That catechesis should have been preceded by regular preaching and teaching and pre-baptismal counseling,

not just about the way the rite is done but especially what the rite means and what it asks of the candidate, parents, godparents, and the congregation.

Baptism is the act of the people of God. Except in very unusual circumstances it should not be celebrated privately. When, because of dire emergency, it must be celebrated privately, as soon as possible it should be reported and affirmed by the assembly by the Affirmation of Baptism, with all the secondary rites that may have been omitted because of the emergency nature of the Baptism. This emphasis on the role of the community in the baptismal rite is shown by the "Welcome" given to the candidates just before the Peace and again by the role given representatives of the congregation in the prayers and in the presentation of the robe and candle as well as at the "Welcome." The service is envisioned as concluding with the Eucharist, which becomes the seal to that welcome.

We are baptized to commune; Baptism is the door to fellowship in word and sacrament. I am aware, of course, that the Lutheran churches in the United States in some ways seem far from ready to endorse the communion of infants.¹ (However, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada has made a favorable decision.) But let me argue that all the reasons that support infant baptism support infant communion and that all of the reasons against infant communion seem to me to argue against infant baptism. If we are celebrating God's grace, we cannot draw lines around one Sacrament and not around the other.

Besides this, we have the present-day witness of the Eastern Churches and, as Canon David Holeyton and others have shown us, we know that in the West, people in places remembered the practice of infant communion almost up until the time of the Reformation. It is a strange thing that we welcome the candidates into the communion of the Church by immediately excommunicating them for a dozen years. At the very least we could admit them at that time to their First Communion before we exclude them.

It might also help us to forget for all time that old saying that we baptize into the church universal but confirm them into the Lutheran church. Sacraments do not belong to denominations. What we have called Confirmation is nothing but the ending of Baptism. In fact, it is all but impossible to distinguish the two, especially now when the *LBW* rite for baptism contains the laying on of hands with a prayer for the Spirit. Even the rite in *LW Agenda* includes a laying on of hands and a prayer for the Spirit, although not together. This Institute is also a good time to remember the argument of its long-time friend, Eugene Brand of the Lutheran World Federation, that as a sign of the catholic character of Baptism, whenever possible Baptism should be celebrated in the presence of representatives of other denominations.

IV. When we stated that this rite was intended not only for the Baptism of the young but also for adults, there were some who scoffed, arguing that we would hardly need to plan for that need. But in more and more places

we are beginning to experience the consequences in living in what may not be a post-Christian age but is certainly an increasingly unbaptized age. The old pattern of ministry to those who had fallen away from the church is changing more frequently into a ministry to those who are strangers to the Church. And just as we become more and more uncertain about the meaning of the confirmation of young people, we are finding it increasingly necessary to address the question of how best to lead adults to Baptism and life in and among the people of God.

Interestingly, the more things change, the more we find ourselves compelled to look into our past to find understanding. And in this case we can find great help in another of the modern Roman Catholic Church's gifts, the Rite of the Christian Initiation of Adults. Some twenty years ago the University of Notre Dame's liturgy program produced a volume on Christian Initiation with the provocative title *Made, Not Born: New Perspectives on Christian Initiation and the Catechumenate*. The phrase "Made, Not Born" I call provocative because we are accustomed today to speak of Baptism in terms of rebirth as opposed to being a work of the whole Church. Yet, reflection makes us acknowledge that many of those baptized at our fonts live lives that are hard to distinguish from those of the unbaptized around them. They may be reborn in some incomplete way (Is that really possible, or have they not been reborn at all in spite of church affiliations?), but they have not been changed into servants of God. To make a Christian requires not a change in ideas, not a change in vocabulary, not a change in membership, but a change in life. Our faith was first called The Way, a reminder that first of all, faith in God requires conversion, a change from one way of life to another.

The word "made" refers to the process by which that conversion can be encouraged and nurtured so that the candidate can begin living in the community of faith as an informed, committed, and competent member of the Body of Christ.

We have already spoken of the season of Lent as the time for the Catechumenate. That Catechumenate in older days was the process of rites, prayers, and moral and doctrinal guidance that prepared the candidates for Baptism at the Vigil. The RCIA, that is, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, provides the rationale and means of the restoration of the Catechumenate at a time when the Church must confront an increasingly pagan world and so increasing finds itself dealing with pre-Christian men and women.

The Catechumenate has with increasing success been reintroduced into our sister Roman Catholic churches. It has become a process whereby converts can be drawn into the life of the church in harmony with the liturgy, church year, and modern realities. This process is now becoming a part of the self-understanding of the Episcopal Church in the United States and the Anglican Church in Canada,² and with that church also the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American and its sister church in Canada.³

These new rites characteristically center the process on the season of Lent and contain a welcome of those preparing for Baptism at a Sunday liturgy and prayers to be offered at the conclusion of instruction periods. Enrollment for Baptism is to take place on the First Sunday in Lent for those being baptized at the Vigil. As an alternative, enrollment may be permitted on the First Sunday in Advent for Baptism on the Epiphany or on the Baptism of Our Lord. Blessing of the Candidates takes place on two Sundays in Lent (or Advent). Baptisms take place at the Vigil or at the Epiphany or that Baptism of Our Lord. Baptism is followed by a period of mystagogy.

The process thus consciously follows the older practice of a period of inquiry, the Catechumenate as a time of deeper formation, a time of candidacy and immediate preparation, Baptism, and a period of growth in understanding sacramental living and its call to mission and life in the community following Baptism. This is no attempt at historicizing but comes out of the conviction that new circumstances require new methods and that the Church's catechetical process in earlier days makes a great deal of sense today.

This effort to put a liturgical shape to the process of evangelizing should meet with a warm response for persons interested in the art and science of worship. Pastors and the educational ministers in parishes should, if they have not already done so, acquaint themselves with this program. This should not be left in the hand of the church bureaucracy to solve all the problems, nor should it be left in the hands of professional church "educators," or its partisans. This is too important to the mission of the Church not to be tested and observed by parish churches.

V. One of my favorite references, as some of you will remember, is a saying of the great Episcopal liturgist and euchologist, the sainted Rev. Dr. Massey H. Shepherd, who spoke at the Institute of Liturgical Studies to our great profit. Questioned by a priest about what might be done to improve the liturgical life of the Church, Dr. Shepherd cautioned the assembly by reminding us that the true test of a liturgy is not how well the musicians do theirs or how well the rubrics are observed. No, he said, the true test of a liturgy is to be found in the lives of the people who share in it.

Every rule of liturgical procedure has but one purpose: to put no obstacle in the people's liturgy; that is, the community's offering up a holy sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise that honestly reflects and makes possible the self-offering of the community's daily life in imitation of the Servant of God, our Lord Jesus Christ.

To be baptized is to be ordained a priest. Priests are bridge-builders and bridge-keepers who offer to God the hurt and injury and sin of the people of the world for healing and who minister the healing of God to the people of the world. At the Lord's own Baptism the Father named Jesus his beloved Son, that is, His servant. God's present-day sons and daughters are likewise named servants.

The tragic events in Oklahoma City five days ago remind us anew of the sin that continues to control humankind in spite of the progress made in human society. You and I have been baptized to witness to an alternate world and way, the Way of the Servant. By our participation on earth in the great Vigil of God's Pascha, we are initiated into the great paschal banquet in the New Jerusalem. We are left here to learn the manners of those who will eat and drink at that great feast. We are left here by God in divine patience so that we can make that feast so luminous in our lives that our neighbors may find their appetites whetted also.

We are the clear and refreshing water that refreshes our world and makes it new. We are the oil of healing that softens the world's wounds. We are the hands that are laid onto our neighbor's lives so God may bless them. We are the light that drives away the darkness. We are the bearers of the Spirit that makes all things new.

That is the true meaning of Baptism. Our liturgies seek only to make this possible.

notes

¹ During the course of the Institute I learned that the ELCA has recently released a first draft for study and comment entitled *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament with Commentary*. This promising statement is included (C3.6a, line 6): "Since the baptized are welcomed into the Body of Christ which lives by grace, infants also may be communed for the first time during the service in which they are baptized."

² *The Catechumenal Process: Adult Initiation and Formation for Christian Life and Ministry*, Office of Evangelism Ministries: The Episcopal Church. New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1990. See also Wilde, James E, ed., *Before and After Baptism: The Work of Teachers and Catechists*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Program, 1988.

³ Huffman, Walter L. ed. *Catechumenal Ministry*. Columbus, OH: The Center for Catechumenal Ministry, Trinity Lutheran Seminary, 1993.

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