

INTEGRITY IS NOURISHED BY LITURGY

Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris readies for its grand reopening on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception in December. Following the devastating fire in 2019 that engulfed its nave, French President Emmanuel Macron pledged to reopen it within a few years. No doubt the ritual will unfold with great fanfare and throngs of believers and onlookers alike.



**DARREN M.
HENSON**

Another magnificent church drew gobs of people last year for the completion of the penultimate soaring tower more than a century in the making: the Sagrada Familia basilica in Barcelona, Spain. Just what is it about these masterpieces that so evoke not just awe and wonder, but a deep stirring of the soul?

Their sheer massiveness, for one, brings this feeling of amazement. When onlookers take in the size, they find themselves mesmerized by the symphonic cohesion throughout the design: a mix of stone, glass, woodwork and materials that exudes harmony. The artistic beauty stands as an icon against society's confusion, complexity and chaos. For centuries, the cathedral model has drawn seekers desiring fulfillment, not only in the world around them but also in their interior life.¹

Integrity signifies an unimpaired condition. For example, in mathematics integers are numbers without fractions or decimals. In other words, things that are complete and undivided possess integrity.

Liturgy, similar in its word origin to physiological ligaments and instrumental ligatures, binds those gathered to God. In one classical definition of God, it is said that God is the undivided and unconditioned ground of all being and creation. When worshippers gather for liturgy, we are reminded that humanity is contingent upon

something larger than itself, namely God. Mass begins by naming and honestly recognizing our breaches of integrity, or acknowledging our sins, which is unflinchingly met by God's mercy, forgiveness and undivided love. Liturgy remembers and celebrates God's saving and healing love in word and sacrament, and it points the gathered assembly toward the full restoration of all creation in eternity.

The Church's documents governing architecture and worship state, "The sacred liturgy is a window to eternity and a glimpse of what God calls us to be."² God desires for us to be our fullest selves, undivided from the *imago Dei* dwelling in

**When worshippers gather for liturgy,
we are reminded that humanity is
contingent upon something larger than
itself, namely God.**

all human life. Thus, it is no wonder that metaphorical images of integrity saturate the liturgy. Liturgical norms state, "Sculpture, furnishings, art-glass, vesture, paintings, bells, organs, and other musical instruments as well as windows, doors, and every visible and tactile detail of architecture possess the potential to express the wholeness, harmony, and radiance of profound beauty."³ This gives context for why materials and items used in worship must be of sound quality and reflect natural integrity. Through examination of how some of these sacred examples hold integrity, we can better emphasize and understand their meaning for our own integrity.



Photo by Rajiek/Shutterstock

Breathtaking aspects of the Antoni Gaudí-designed La Sagrada Família in Barcelona, Spain, signal to worshippers that they are in a sacred space.

INTEGRITY OF SYMBOLS

There was much abuzz about the return of the bees when a fresh translation of the liturgical texts came to English-speaking communities in 2011.⁴ Liturgical law requires the Paschal candle (also referred to as the Christ candle) to be made from 100% beeswax. Other altar candles must be comprised of at least 51% beeswax. The poetic prayer text of the Easter Exsultet, chanted at the vigil in a dark church and illuminated only by the Paschal candle and individual tapers lighted therefrom, praises the bees for creating the candle's wax and offering its use. The candle's burning flame reflects the light and life of the Risen Lord. The radical reality of the resurrection must be matched by pure wax gifted from creation itself.

Another significant symbol of Christ Jesus in the liturgy that demands natural materials is the altar. Once a bishop dedicates one, it is Christ.⁵ A Eucharistic liturgy begins with the priest presider greeting this symbol of Christ by kissing the altar. The *mensa*, or tabletop, is made of natural stone since it represents Christ Jesus, the Living Stone

(1 Peter 2:4). Upon the stone or rock of Christ, the people bring forth simple gifts of bread and wine. The bread must be unleavened wheat bread with no sweeteners or additives, and the wine must be unspoiled "fruit of the vine," or grape wine, and not of other fruits. Here, too, the visible elements of liturgy reflect integrity or wholeness.

Music plays a preeminent role in liturgical prayer. Church documents presume the use of an organ or piano at worship — along with a cantor or choir — to serve and enable the gathered faithful to offer their own voices in prayer and praise. Music is primordial, and it served as a precursor to human speech. Liturgical documents stress the importance of live music. Recorded music can facilitate rehearsals, yet it should never replace the congregation, choir, organ or piano, and other instrumentalists at the liturgy.⁶ There is an integrity to live music. Not only does it eschew the commodification and consumption of recorded music, but it also brings disparate voices into a harmonious whole.⁷ The meter of music syncs voices and words together the way a parade aligns the steps

of a marching band.

Like music, church documents call for authenticity in the flowers and decorations used at Mass. Living flowers and other plants, as opposed to silks or plastics, stand as reminders of the gift of life God has given to the human community.⁸ Even as flowers wither and plants shed brittle leaves, they remind us of the Paschal mystery: the rhythm of birth, life, death and new life revealed in Jesus' life.

Even the vestments that liturgical ministers wear should be made of traditional or natural materials. The vision is that items used in liturgy possess a nobility and dignity that enables sacredness to shine through more clearly, particularly in our synthetically saturated — if not artificial — world.

More than a decade ago, when the iPad hit the sales floor, a savvy priest created an app for the Roman Missal (the liturgical book used by a priest presiding at Mass), causing a hubbub in liturgy circles and among some Catholic faithful.⁹ The discussions stemmed from a Catholic sensibility that liturgy draws upon nature where God is revealed. Electronic devices are far removed from their natural components and further obscure hints of the divine imprint upon them.

There are plenty of examples of those so fixated on liturgical details that they lose all sight of the deeper intended meaning evoked by the symbol. While avoiding liturgical fussiness on the one hand, a more genuine perspective is to view these examples as deep commitments to authenticity. When we steep ourselves in things that are authentic and discover the meaning, beauty and inspiration they elicit from us, we may be more likely to imitate them.

INDIVIDUAL INTEGRITY

Articles on business leadership and organizational culture offer steady advice on integrity and authenticity. People pay good money for courses and conferences on this topic. And yet, for centuries, liturgy has offered a noncommodified means of growing in authenticity and fostering our integrity.

The liturgy offers an alternate view of the world, as well as our relationships to one another, to God and to ourselves. In addition to seeing

and claiming our whole selves as body, mind and spirit, it also positions us within the cosmos, as it should. If integrity refers to a wholeness, then we must see our whole selves within it.

Corporate programs and dazzling conventions would make us think that integrity is something we can produce on our own with the right set of drills, like a fitness routine. Yet, claiming and growing into our own fullness and authenticity as God's own daughters and sons may have less to do with what we do but rather attentiveness to what God is doing to us and desires to do through us.

It is a mistake to think that God needs our praise — God certainly does not need our worship. After all, God, as the source of all life and creation, does not need anything. Instead, it is we who need the actions and rhythms of liturgy. We grow and strengthen our integrity when we place ourselves before the One who made us, sees our inmost depths and gently forms us evermore into the image and likeness of God. Theologian James Alison aptly reflected that, at the Eucharistic liturgy, our primary role is to give thanks, relax and allow God to do with us as God wills.¹⁰

Through the liturgy's rituals, we encounter the living God to whom we belong. As we look around the assembly, we see the community in which we live and the lives of others who depend upon us and our dependence upon them.

At liturgy, we finally pull down the shades over electronic screens and silence our devices, and with nothing more than empty hands and open hearts, we rest in the lap of divine love. We set aside the pages and tabs of spreadsheets, close down the dashboards, and allow the natural beauty and wonder from the sung processions to the proclaimed word from human voice, bodily gestures of peace and sacred objects to tap into the recesses of our mind and soak into our soul. Through the liturgy's rituals, we encounter the living God to whom we belong. As we look around the assembly, we see the community in which we live and the lives of others who depend upon us and our dependence upon them. At liturgy we offer our praise and gratitude to the God who cre-

ated and sustains it all and draws it all back into God's vision of integrated harmony and love.

Some leaders of ministry formation programs may feel swayed to bypass experiences in a Catholic chapel or liturgical space out of a good-intentioned sensitivity that leaders in Catholic health care come from society's plurality. Such sensitivities to non-Catholics pose an important awareness. At the same time, the liturgy's many symbols provide clues about a Catholic view of healing, whole-person care, relationship with the wider church community and creation itself, and one's own connection to transcendent realities. The chapels, churches and sacred spaces reveal aspects about the sisters and brothers who founded our ministries. Their prophetic vision and integrity of word and deed could not have been realized apart from the fullness of life or integrity they encountered in Jesus, most often experienced in daily rituals of the liturgy.

One facet of formation is to invite leaders to explore aspects of Catholic identity. This is especially true for individuals who come from life experiences with scant experiences with Catholicism, Christianity or any type of religious perspective. Ministry formation in Catholic health care never proselytizes. Orienting a formation cohort to a Catholic worship space is akin to a tour guide showing foreigners hidden gems in La Sagrada Familia.

Ministry formation provides the opportunity to introduce and offer insight to participants about sacred spaces and the rituals they contain and affords an opportunity for dialogue and questioning. Participants may see the liturgy and its environment as a composite whole, reflecting the mystery of God who desires closeness and intimacy with God's creation, especially with all people bearing God's image and likeness. Ministry formation's rituals and liturgical experiences may heal wounds of misunderstanding and offer fresh awareness.

A CONNECTION TO SELF AND BEAUTY

When someone enters a glorious sacred space, like Notre Dame, a hush befalls them. It is akin to first stepping into a forest dripping with evergreen branches. It is a profound encounter with beauty, which, from ancient philosophy to today,

is a primary means used by the Divine to reach us. The liturgy urges us to see things differently and more deeply. It forms minds and hearts to become live with a similar authenticity and integrity as reflected in the sacred objects and the presence of Christ Jesus encountered in the ritual.

DARREN M. HENSON, PhD, STL, is senior director of ministry formation at the Catholic Health Association, St. Louis.

NOTES

1. Robert Barron, *Heaven in Stone and Glass: Experiencing the Spirituality of the Great Cathedrals* (Chestnut Ridge, New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2002).
2. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture, and Worship*, section 15.
3. USCCB, *Built of Living Stones*, section 149.
4. Rose Pacatte, "Bees' Return Enriches Easter Vigil," *National Catholic Reporter*, March 27, 2016, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/bees-return-enriches-easter-vigil>; Shawn Tribe, "Easter and the Bees," *Liturgical Arts Journal*, April 13, 2020, <https://www.liturgicalartsjournal.com/2020/04/easter-and-bees.html>.
5. USCCB, *Built of Living Stones*, sections 56-57. See also "Rite of Dedication of an Altar," Chapter 4, no. 9.
6. USCCB, *Built of Living Stones*, sections 60-62.
7. Albert Borgmann presents an excellent reflection on recorded music's pitfalls in his thoughtful critique of technology. He argues that a technology-driven lifestyle beckons for a human response that can only come from what he terms "focal practices," or activities that people must continuously practice and that require a focus of the mind. These activities can be things like jogging, playing an instrument or baking. The ultimate focal practice is liturgy. See his book: *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Publishing Group, 2003), 29-33.
8. USCCB, *Built of Living Stones*, section 129.
9. "NZ Bishops: No Liturgical Use of Roman Missal iPad," *CathNews New Zealand*, May 1, 2012, <https://cathnews.co.nz/2012/05/01/nz-bishops-say-no-to-liturgical-use-of-roman-missal-apps-for-ipad/>.
10. James Alison, "Those with Eyes to See," James Alison, March 19, 2005, <http://jamesalison.com/those-with-eyes-to-see/>.