

Some Suggestions

I would love to be able to guarantee that what follows will improve a parish's ability to manage effective liturgy but, in all honesty, I can only offer suggestions. This is so because, let me repeat, each parish in the world is idiosyncratic. Each must examine these suggestions and decide for itself whether and how they are applicable. And so, to it....

DELIGHT

Delight in your children. That is the basis for children's liturgy. Delight especially in the very young, who can often do no more than play trucks in the aisles. For these very young are the ones that Jesus liked to have around. In whom Jesus delighted, we should delight. And remember that children are baptized and so have the right to be there. At the very least, their play is a joyful noise to the Lord, even if it's a pain in the ear to adults. When there is a scream or a shout, it is praise out of the mouths of babes. The order of liturgy must accommodate this chaos of praise. But that's not all....

WHAT'S ALL THIS KIDS STUFF ANYWAY?

If Jesus really means what he says that unless we become like one of these little children, we will not see the kingdom, then we have to ask what does it mean to become like a little child?

I saw a TV ad in Canada recently that said, "No matter how hard you try you just can't think like a kid,"¹ and went on to sell a product. The thought stuck though: can we think like kids? What does it mean to think like a child?

I asked John Nolan, a puppet theatre practitioner (see below), what it meant to think like a child or to see the world through a child's eyes? He

¹ "Bounce" (paper towel) TV Ad, 2001

thought a moment and replied, “You have to see something as if it were your very first time.”

The idea that we should see things as if for the first time resonates with phrases we may hear as adults, like “get back to basics,” “turn around your life,” start all over again,” or in Christian scriptures, *metanoia* (turn around).

As adults, especially in most adult liturgy, we’ve finished playing with ritual reality and now work at the level of vestige. That is how some of our symbols can so easily degrade into vestiges of their full experience. It’s as if we say, “yeah, yeah, we get it, now let’s move on.” We reify too much.

The call of childhood, in Jesus’ view, means replaying our liturgical experience like kids do—again and again, in its fullness. It means we have to look again at what we do with fresh eyes, the eyes of a child.

THE CHILD AND THE ADULT: COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Adults observe reality. Children engage it². Even at the level of game playing, adults first and foremost concentrate on the rules of the game. Children discover the rules of a game in the playing of it. Both approaches have their place in life. Both are polar opposites.

Having said that, adults can engage reality. They do so as audience for a good play. They do so once they are in the thick of things. They simply take more time to get involved, which is one reason why we have introductory rites and processions and stuff.

Children can observe reality, too, without engagement. They do so when they are afraid or uncertain. They look for clues that they can get involved. But usually, their engagement is instantaneous with reality. After all, their filter set is less advanced than an experienced adult.

In liturgy, adults are concerned with order. Kids just want to have fun (with apologies to Cyndi Lauper). Fixating on the rules of the game bores them. The game is what counts.

² Guardini espouses a similar notion in the small pamphlet “The Spirit of the Liturgy,” when he says “The child, when it plays, does not aim at anything. It has no purpose. It does not want to do anything but to exercise its youthful powers...” *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Romano Guardini, Sheed & Ward, London, 1937, p. 98