The U.S. bishops were rather direct in *Sing to the Lord*: “Faith grows when it is well expressed in celebration. Good celebrations can foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations may weaken it” (*STL*, 5). This claim places a great responsibility on those of us who would lead the people of God in prayer (*STL*, 18). As leaders of prayer, we help to mediate an encounter between the assembly and Christ by helping to create a certain quality of space and time. While such a ministry requires competence in what we do, it rests first of all on who we are.

**Being before doing**

To minister effectively, we must be contemplative before we can be active; before we can lead prayer we need to be pray-ers (see *Novo Millennio Inevntus*, 15, 38). Otherwise, we risk becoming mere performers.

How might we focus our lives of prayer as liturgical leaders? We need to begin by developing a deep attentiveness to God’s presence in the world around us. Such a contemplative stance before the world, rooted in a sacramental imagination, leads to awe and wonder, humility and gratitude—fundamental dispositions for liturgy.

*Lectio divina*, a prayerful reading of and meditation on the scriptures, is an ancient practice of the Church, and one especially recommended for those of us who proclaim and preach the word. But what of the Church’s prayer texts? Why not use the Missal in *lectio*, whether alone or with a group of other ministers? That way, when we proclaim those texts in the midst of the assembly, they are already part of us; they have already begun to soak into our bones.

In addition to a life of prayer that grounds our ministry, it is important to still ourselves before leading the community in worship. Too often, we are busy attending to last-minute details or greeting members of the community before the liturgy—and so we enter into it scattered and distracted rather than present to the moment. In order to ensure such quiet time, perhaps the greeting of parishioners should wait until after the liturgy, and the tasks of final preparation assigned to other ministers?

*continued on page 12*
From being to doing: Authenticity

To be immersed in prayer, both devotional and liturgical, is to be open to the grace of transformation. If we are to become more Christ-like, then our liturgical ministry will be marked by authenticity and attentiveness.

As ministers, our role is to foster an encounter between Christ and those gathered for worship. Therefore, we need to be transparent, allowing Christ to be encountered through us. In practice, that means cultivating an attitude of humility, keeping our idiosyncrasies in check and refusing to impose our personal piety on the people of God.

But it also means that Christ is encountered through us. Such is the mystery of an incarnational, sacramental Church: God comes to us in the things of this world, including one another. Humility is not marked by self-abasement, but by radical honesty. As leaders of prayer, we fail the assembly if we fail to embrace our ministry of liturgical presidency—or reduce it to mere functionality.

Authenticity also requires that we be comfortable with our own bodies. Do I vest and process with care? Are my gestures full and inviting? Do I sing and make the responses that are mine to make, and fall silent when I am not to respond? Do I treat the altar with respect, and not use it as a place to throw whatever I am not using? Do I handle the books and vessels with grace and care?

Authenticity requires letting our symbols speak. Do we use real flowers and plants, real candles? Do we immerse in water and lavishly anoint with oil? Do we prepare enough bread and wine so that all who wish to do so may receive Communion from the gifts that are offered?

Authentic leadership in the liturgy also requires the honest admission that we cannot minister alone. We need the ministry of musicians to help us raise our voices in song (so we need to turn our microphones off when we are not praying on behalf of the assembly). We need the ministry of readers, for we need to hear the word of God and be transformed by it (so we need to listen attentively to the proclamation). At the Eucharistic liturgy, the presence of a deacon helps to make it clear that even the priest-celebrant is both minister and ministered-to.

From being to doing: Attentiveness

In order to lead prayer we also need to be present to the moment. Being distracted by “what comes next” can be minimized by developing a deep knowledge and thorough understanding of the liturgy and how it flows, and by avoiding the temptation to change the rite to suit our preferences. Ritual demands repetition; such repetition allows all of us to enter into the liturgy without anxiety, to be present to what we are doing together.

On the one hand, as presiders we do have the responsibility of coordinating the various liturgical ministries. On the other, how can we keep from being distracted by that responsibility? We first need to focus on helping our ministers become as competent as possible, and then we need to let go in humility and trust them to do what they have been prepared to do. Perhaps we even ought to consider renewing the ministry of the master of ceremonies in our parishes, especially for more involved liturgies like the Easter Vigil (GIRM, 106), so as to allow the presider to focus on praying the liturgy.

Whether we are attentive to the present moment or distracted by what is to come, we will show it in how we relate to the assembly. If I begin to speak my part while the assembly is still changing postures, then I have clearly communicated that I am not paying attention to them—and that I do not respect the dialogical nature of the liturgy. If I am flipping pages while we are praying together, then I am not really praying but simply saying the words while my attention is elsewhere.

To be attentive is to practice the art of hospitality, to take the time that is necessary to be with and for another. Efficiency is not a liturgical virtue! Liturgy invites us out of chronos into kairos, from ordinary calendar time into the fullness of time. Liturgy is about moments of encounter, not minutes ticking away. It’s about “We’re done already?”—not “Aren’t we done yet?” Perhaps, as we put our vestments on, as we step through the threshold from time to timeless, we should also take off our watches.

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