

Spirit of the Season

Easter 2007

Liturgical Year C www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/SOS

Cycle Of Prayer – Resources

One of the challenges to an RE coordinator, to a class teacher, or a chaplain is finding the right resources for celebrations of the liturgy or times of prayer. It might sometimes seem the main challenge is finding ANY resources! But, mostly, it will be a question of choosing from a range of materials what are the right resources for your needs.

Quite often agencies and other bodies linked with Days of Prayer in the Cycle of Prayer will send resources to schools. Experience shows that some of these are good and some of these are not. Sometimes the liturgical resources offered fail to follow good practice, and run the risk of undermining the best practice that you will be trying to follow in your ministry to the children in your care. Sometimes they turn an act of worship into a promotion for their particular 'cause'. If you are sent resources like that, do not feel obliged to use them. Bin them, and develop something simple and appropriate yourself - maybe a meditation on images culled from the web, ending with simple intercessory prayer.

That said often there are very good resources offered. In this season you can expect materials from the National Vocations Office and from the Catholic Communication Network. Just be sure to test them out against the general principles offered in the Bishops' *Celebrating the Mass* and in the *Directory for Masses with Children*. Always do the same with the generally excellent Resource collections available from Catholic and other Christian publishers: collections such as the Iona Community Worship Book and the Church of England's new *Times and Seasons* which can be useful books to have in your school resource library.

Other reliable resources are offered in the Missal - check out the range of often suitable prayers found in the section for Various Needs and Occasions (may not be in a Weekday/Sunday Missal but to be found on pp. 789-852 of the altar edition for England and Wales and in the related section on Volume III of the Lectionary). Other resources will be found in such liturgical books as the *Book of Blessings* which contains blessings suitable for many occasions. In the section on the Cycle of Prayer on the Liturgy Office website there is for every intention a list of liturgical resources. Liturgical song books are a key resource too – not only for hymns but to locate simple chants and psalm settings. Make use of all these various resources - but always do so with care

Easter
8 April - 27 May 2007

New Members of the Church

Vocations
World Day of Prayer for Vocations
4th Sunday of Easter 29/4/07

The Right Use of the Media
World Communications Day
Ascension 20/5/07

Human Work
St Joseph the Worker 1/5/07

The Church
Pentecost Sunday 27/5/07

[www.liturgyoffice.org/
Calendar/Cycle](http://www.liturgyoffice.org/Calendar/Cycle)



Making Connections

Liturgy & Catechesis

For those initiated into the Church at the Easter Vigil the season of Easter is a period of mystagogia – a time of deepening reflection on the mysteries they have celebrated or, as it is also called, post-baptismal catechesis.

Much of our contemporary understanding of liturgy and catechesis (and religious education) and how they connect is derived from the insights drawn from the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. All who are baptised can be said to be in post-baptismal catechesis and the fundamental form of liturgical catechesis is mystagogy – the reflection on what has been (celebrated) and learning from it.

The art of mystagogy is ancient and the best teachers are, perhaps, those Fathers of the Early Church whose mystagogical homilies have come down to us: Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Ambrose. If this sounds a little esoteric and archaic their method would be familiar. Their homilies to the newly baptised are peppered with questions about the experience of the liturgy and being baptised such as: *what happened, what did it feel like when..., what happened next?*

These are questions that could be asked of any group of children after a celebration of liturgy. The process of question and answer is first one of assimilation; by recalling the experience we make it our own. But fundamental to this ancient method is the belief that we cannot begin to understand until we have had the experience. As what we experience in the liturgy is participation in mystery we know that this process of understanding is lifelong – ever deepening.

Furthermore the method tells us that the liturgy is a source for catechesis. The skilled mystagogue or teacher can draw on the narrative of the experience and highlight what can be learnt.

The liturgy as a source of catechesis is one of the underlying values of *Spirit of the Season*. If we want to know what Easter is about perhaps the first place to look might be the liturgy of Easter. The same could be said of other liturgical seasons or the Sacraments of the Church.



With this method there is the danger of a false assumption that experience is all. As though baptism in the 4th Century was like a visit to a fairground 'haunted house' – moved from place to place, immersed in water, covered in oil with the candidates not having a clue what was happening but that the experience was heightened by making it mysterious.

Any good teacher knows students need preparation before they do something for the first time whether it is a trip to the theatre or a sports event. The purpose of the preparation is, to use a liturgical phrase, to enable participation. Good preparation does not, however, over explain; it is a real skill. How many times have we been told that we will really love something and then we are less enthusiastic about it. When we are young we sometimes see this as a failing on our part which can become a distraction from our appreciation. Good preparation does not tell us what our experience will be, rather it enables us to have or appreciate the experience.

There are 3 parts to liturgical catechesis: preparation for liturgy (as just outlined), participation in liturgy and reflection on liturgy.

Our participation in liturgy is formative. There are obvious key moments such as the homily and introductions. The development of a cycle of preparation-participation-reflection however is to help us participate better or deeper. The deeper our participation the more we are formed by the liturgy, are catechised by it. Good liturgy and liturgy as catechesis is about more than reflection on texts; it is also about the insights that symbols can bring to our faith, the patterns of relationships that the liturgy forms us in.

Points for Reflection

- What can I remember from the last liturgy I participated in?
- What did it tell me?

Points for Action

- Try some mystagogical reflection with the children.
- Do you talk with a priest celebrant about helping him preparing homilies?

Teaching Music for the Liturgy

The most effective way of teaching a song is by singing it, usually without any instruments. You are simply demonstrating what you are asking others to do.

Having said that, some songs might be easier to teach with a bit of accompaniment both to give you confidence and to offer support in terms of harmony and rhythm. On the other hand songs which are relatively high in pitch (that maybe require a leap of faith!) can be taught in a lower key. Be clear about the role of any group of singers and instrumentalists – to support.

Sing the response/chorus all the way through first – it gives people an idea of what to expect: how much they need to learn and an idea of the style and shape of the music.

Teach songs line by line, or break them down into reasonable chunks. You might tell them that the first and last line are the same, for example, to help them to remember it better.

Be confident – know the words/music from memory if possible. How you first sing something, e.g. dynamics, tempo, will influence how it is remembered.

Be prepared – there's nothing worse than hunting for your music when leading! If it helps, write down what you are going to say. Be careful about the language you use – you aim is to enable participation in prayer.

Be enthusiastic about the song. Explain why it has been chosen, what it will contribute to the liturgy.

If you are singing a song in another language (including Latin or Greek), give a translation.

How will you find the right note to start on? It is not always easy to find the note from a guitar chord - you might want to ask for the note from a melody instrument or for the guitarist to play a single note for you.

Use eye contact and smile... especially when you make a mistake! You are human!

Some people find it useful to use one hand to indicate where the music goes up and down - this is not necessarily a precise art and you don't need a lot of musical knowledge! It can help people to learn music more quickly.

Compliment people when they sing something well.

Listen out for any lines which people find difficult and repeat those lines rather than the whole piece. Avoid predicting mistakes – it is an invitation for them to happen...

Singing makes you vulnerable. Be realistic about what you expect. Take a different approach with different age groups.

As a rule, do not try to teach more than 3 songs at one time.

What shall we sing?

Processions

Mass can be seen as a sequence of processions: Entrance, Gospel, Preparation of Gifts, Communion and at the end. A procession is one way of seeing that a celebration of liturgy is a movement; we have been moved, we are in a different place at the end.

Processions are either, like the Gospel procession, something the majority will see or, like the Communion procession, something in which all join. Processions can be from place to place – as on Palm Sunday or a Corpus Christi procession – or an assembly might begin with each class processing in.

What makes a good procession?

It needs to go from somewhere to somewhere. It often has visual elements to give it shape. These might include a cross, candles and incense leading but it might also include banners and streamers.

Music makes a good procession. Music draws people into one body; it unites them. It can give rhythm and a sense of purpose and direction.

Types of Music

The primary experience of processions is visual or physical. A Gospel procession needs to be seen; people in a Communion procession need to move. Both of these place limitations on the best types of music to use – music that allows people both to sing, to be united, and to see or to move. This suggests songs that can be sung without looking at pieces of paper (or screens). Songs that are known by heart; songs, like Taizé chants, that can be repeated over and over; songs where there is a slight change between verses; songs with memorable refrains where the verses can be sung by a cantor or a group.

Putting it Together — Retreat Days

Taking people out of their familiar surroundings and daily routines can create an opportunity to focus and reflect, to get away, escape, retreat! In this busy world where there is too much to do and too little time to do it the pace of a retreat day can be slower or the emphasis changed to pay greater attention to God, others and self. However, academic pressure can often deter schools from making this valuable investment of time.

With the right atmosphere, and preparation beforehand, they can become safe places for pupils to explore their faith. A new environment can also encourage pupils to try something new and days away from school on retreat are an ideal opportunity to explore new ideas and new ways of thinking and praying.

You could view the whole day as one long liturgy; spending time gathering together, then listening and sharing with each other, being involved in some activity that leads to a sense of mystagogy – reflecting on what the day has

offered people, what we have learnt, how we have changed. You may also like to extend the retreat beyond a day and spend 24 hours or a weekend exploring the different dimensions of faith.

It's worth noting that it isn't just pupils who can benefit from a retreat day – why not consider having a staff retreat experience?

Any time away from school demands a great deal of preparation. However, this could be reduced by using one of the many retreat centres with teams of people who are skilled in leading these kinds of days – perhaps your diocesan youth service can help?

If you'd like to run the day yourself here are some ideas you might wish to use on a retreat day using the liturgical structure of Gather-Listen-Respond-Go. They are not intended to all be used in a single day but they are intended as a starting point to inspire you to create your own ideas.

Gather

- Begin the day with Icebreaker games
- Take time to get to know people on a deeper level - find out something new about them
- Invite people to share their hopes/dreams/fears/worries for the retreat

Listen

- Invite people to share a personal witness of faith/testimony
- Guided meditation – possibly based on scripture
- Use a short clip from a video/DVD to highlight the theme of the day

Respond

- Go for an 'Emmaus walk' with someone to talk about your life, relationship with God etc..
- Allow each person to write in an affirmation book for those on the day
- Set up various prayer stations or a labyrinth for people to choose to go to

Go

- Take part in an act of commitment - people sign their names to a set of hopes/promises
- Give people a piece of scripture away to take away and reflect on
- Have individual blessings



Getting in touch

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