



## Hope and Harmony

Keynote Address at the 2010 Annual Convention  
of the National Associations of Pastoral Musicians

July 13, 2010

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### We gather in Detroit

to proclaim **harmony** in the face of discord and division,  
and to sing **hope**, in the face of fear and uncertainty.  
At least that's what the NPM website has promised.

I have been asked to launch this celebration of harmony and hope. This is a real challenge for me, since I – as I suspect many of you – have found it harder and harder to ‘sing the Lord’s song in this alien land.’ Too often, of late, I have been ready ‘to hang up my harp.’

What I offer you this afternoon is as much the fruit of my own interior struggle and my prayer as it is of years of scholarship and training. I accept this opportunity, in the spirit of the First Letter of Peter: “Always be prepared to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence.”

Here follows, then, an account of the hope that is in me. I am going to consider the **present**, the **past**, and the **future** because: hope requires of us first, that we are clear-eyed about the situation in which we find ourselves; second, hope is generated and sustained by our thoughtful remembrance of a living and life-giving history; third, hope gives us courage to make choices now in order to realize the future we long for.

### Part I: The Context

First then, a clear-eyed summary of the present context.

Harmony and hope are not the first words that spring to mind these days, as we contemplate the state of our country, our church or our beleaguered liturgical life.

Consider the country: Whatever happened to that amazing outpouring of hope all over the United States, even around the globe, which began in November 2008 and reached a crescendo in January of 2009? A tide of hope was surging through the streets. Whether you supported Barack Obama or not, it was impossible not to be caught up in the elation of that inauguration, in the symbolism of a young African American family moving into the White House, in a bright, articulate and passionate leader with an agenda for change that coincided so much with our own Catholic social teachings on poverty and health care and immigration and education. There was hope of bi-partisan collaboration for the common good of the country. There was hope of an

early withdrawal of troops from Iraq and Afghanistan and a new foreign policy which would bring harmony to the middle east and, indeed, to the whole world. There was hope for a comprehensive energy strategy more reliant on natural, renewable sources. There was hope that the United States would take its place, with new humility, as a partner among nations, that we would become once again a moral leader, less for our military might and our gross domestic product than for the vision we espouse: "...that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness." (Obama Inaugural Address)

It was a hope-filled and heady agenda.

But the economic crisis only deepened and it has a human face for us: our family members, our neighbors, our friends, indeed some of us sitting in this room, who have lost jobs or houses or savings or a sense of security in these unnerving times.

And a critical piece of the social agenda dragged through Congress month after month. The debate on health care illuminated powerful and well-funded special interests and conflicting values, and served to cement the ideological divide among our elected leaders. A tea party formed, thoroughly disaffected with Democrats and Republicans alike. And then intemperate rhetoric on all sides was notched up a few decibels. Debate has been replaced by diatribe – and no one is listening to those of different persuasions anymore anyway.

And the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq appear in a quagmire of shifting strategies, and closer to home, the dreaded but nameless "other" is symbolized by the immigration laws of Arizona, by the "English only" regulations in Tennessee, and by a two thousand mile, nine foot high fence under construction along our border with Mexico, a fence Rand Paul has recently proposed be electrified!

And now the oil spill in the gulf – which seems to be a metaphor for all that has gone before. It is a crisis of biblical proportions. And there are conflicting solutions, and there are those who are jockeying for leadership and turning this tragedy into political capital, but mostly we seem powerless in the face of these millions of gallons of oil heading inexorably towards our shores, taking jobs and lives away every bit as much as the natural habitat is being defiled. And everywhere there is blame which is often the flip side of powerlessness.

Even such a bright and charismatic president can't turn the ship of state around fast enough, or get the oil booms in place to save the wetlands, or bring victory to the insurgency in Hellman Province, or get his Congress to talk to one another for the sake of the common good.

We move to the Church, the Body of Christ, which unfortunately is aping the body politic, a mirror image of the disenchantment and division within our country. Yet within living memory we had, in the church, an experience of exuberant hope analogous to that of Obama's inauguration in our country.

Let me tell you a story which goes back to the days of the Second Vatican Council, a story told to me by Godfrey Diekmann, OSB, a patristic scholar, a charismatic speaker and teacher and an indefatigable promoter of the liturgical movement from the late 1930's forward. Godfrey and Monsignor Fred McManus were the two Americans invited to assist with the liturgical preparatory commission of the Council and to stay on during the Council to serve as expert consultants for the US bishops. Godfrey remembered the day when the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy was presented for a vote, chapter by chapter. He watched proceedings from the balcony in St. Peter's. And the votes were virtually unanimous. Godfrey told me of his euphoria that day – there was more lay involvement, more liturgical participation, more use of the language of the people, more than all the early liturgical reformers had ever dared dream.

That evening Godfrey and Fred went to dinner with some of the U.S. bishops. They were gathered at the Cavalleri Hilton outside Rome toasting this amendment and that compromise when a woman leaned over from a neighboring table and said: “Aren’t you all Americans? Don’t you know your president was shot today?” They went out into the night, looking for a Church where they could celebrate a requiem Mass.

That story has touched me so much because it speaks of an amazing conjunction of events. The election of President Kennedy signaled that the Catholic Church had come of age in the United States. The Church moved out of the ghetto and into the mainstream. And this momentous event converged with the Second Vatican Council which promoted rapprochement with the modern world, identification with its joys and its sufferings, interreligious dialogue, a language of tolerance and understanding, a church opening its windows so that the Spirit could blow through. Truly the spirit of *aggiornamento* was in the air. And I contend that nowhere across the world were the reforms of the Second Vatican Council received with as much delight and implemented with as much relish and competence as in the United States of America. There was new life and there was energy and there was an outpouring of hope. But that energy and life, that fresh vision of ourselves as church, that great awakening to the mysteries we celebrate began more than forty-five years ago.

What’s happened to our Church?

Fast forward to the present and the sorry sight that greets us.

We can compare the spreading oil spill in the Gulf to the spreading ooze of the sexual abuse crisis – ooze hitting the shores first of one country and then another, defiling everything in its path. The fall-out from sexual abuse has been intense and has rocked the church to its foundations. This is a crisis of such monumental proportions that it will be years, decades even, before the toll in human lives destroyed, ecclesial credibility gravely compromised, and a church in serious financial crisis is in any way ameliorated.

Already though, before the sexual abuse revelations, disaffection with the church was growing. The number of practicing Catholics in the US has dwindled over the last several decades. According to the Pew Forum on Religion in Public Life, 25% of Americans have changed denominations from the Church of their childhood and roughly ten percent of Americans today are former Catholics. I find that astonishing. We have spent so much time considering the clergy shortage that we have missed what seems to be an equally significant trend. Let’s call it the laity shortage...people simply drifting away in search of life elsewhere.

There is, indeed, the parallel clergy shortage. According to a Georgetown poll, more than three out of ten Catholics say they have been personally affected by the clergy shortage. The latest statistics I have found indicate that over 18% of parishes are now without a resident pastor. Since 1995, more than 800 parishes have closed, most since 2000.

Who is asking why? Who is wondering whether the very public intramural battles of our church have driven both parishioners and potential priestly vocations away: the silencing of theologians; the skirmishes about which politicians should be denied communion; the fierce debate about Notre Dame’s choice of a graduation speaker; the clash of positions in the health care debate; the visitation of American women religious to determine if we are being faithful to the vows and vision we once embraced; the anomaly of welcoming married Episcopal priests and allowing their continued ministry while maintaining the discipline of celibacy; the question of women’s role, still a controversial issue thirty-two years after the Vatican forbid discussion of women’s ordination; dioceses facing bankruptcy and choosing lay-offs, parish closings and

mergers leading, in some instances, to bitter law suits. All of this is very public and very contentious and for many, very demoralizing.

In the Church, just as in our country, there is a great hardening of ideological positions and an astonishing lack of civility among us. There are different camps on almost every issue of any import and there is a fair amount of distrust and fear. Some websites are positively venomous, using language as angry and hectoring as the rhetoric of the political extreme. We are mirroring the culture in our country, the shift from dialogue and debate to diatribe.

And all of our divisions are played out when we gather for worship. The liturgy is, of its very nature, a perfectly condensed statement of our identity and our beliefs as the Body of Christ. When we gather for worship we bring to public ritual expression our understanding of – and relationship with – God, our understanding of the community and how we relate to one another, our understanding of the holy, of authority, of inclusion and a host of other core beliefs...All of it is enacted in the choices we make, the arrangement of space, the ways and times we sit and stand, the ministers who stand before us, the focus of the homily, the music we select, the amount of liturgical participation we promote, how we receive communion, even the register of the language which we select.

I would venture to say that what we gather to celebrate is beyond dispute. We gather for the praise and glory of God, to enact the saving mystery of Christ's death and rising, in the power of their abundant and life giving spirit. But while what we celebrate is generally beyond dispute, how we celebrate it is the subject of wildly divergent and divisive choices. And most of us in this room are in positions of liturgical leadership, trying to accommodate an increasingly fractious community, being pulled by the competing agendas of those we serve, and being deeply affected by the present contentious environment of the country and the church.

Where do we find reason for hope? In the midst of conflict and division, perhaps hope will find a foothold by remembering our living and life-giving history, so that's where we now turn, grounding hope in our recent history.

## **Part II: Grounding Hope in Our Recent History**

In order to gain some perspective on this present crossroads moment and in order to build for the future, I want to recall for you some of the wonderful gifts of the liturgical reforms of Vatican II. Those of you in hearing distance under the age of forty don't know the "before," at least in an experiential way, and I suspect most of us over forty can barely comprehend the scope of the renewal which touched every facet of our sacramental lives.

Have you ever really considered how monumental was the implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy once it received virtually unanimous approval by the Council Fathers in 1963?

The vision of liturgy and sacrament contained in the Constitution on the Liturgy needed, first of all, reformed ritual books. Then liturgy in the vernacular demanded a colossal effort of translation from the Latin for all the major language groups. Even before the Council was over, for example, the International Commission for English in the Liturgy was born. Its mandate was the preparation of worthy texts and the composition of original texts at the service of all the English speaking bishops' conferences. And the books were wanted YESTERDAY.

Between 1969 and 1974, a five year span of time, every major rite was translated into English, beginning with the Roman Missal. There followed: the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults; the Rite of Infant Baptism; the Rite of Confirmation; the marriage, ordination and

profession rites; the Consecration of a Church and an Altar; the Rite of Reconciliation; the Pastoral Care of the Sick; and the Order of Christian Funerals. Within a few years we also were in possession of the four volume Liturgy of the Hours, the Book of Blessings, and the Pontifical.

By any standards, this was an astounding new library tumbling off the presses! Admittedly much of this work was done in haste. Always there was the understanding that there would be a second generation of books prepared in greater leisure after evaluation of the pastoral effectiveness of the original rites, the need for new texts, and a rearrangement of material to better serve the context of different countries which shared a common language.

Leaders were needed to introduce the reform – men and women trained both in sacramental theology and in pastoral liturgy. Notre Dame, Catholic University, St. John's at Collegeville, Rensselaer, and a host of summer schools too, shaped programs in historical, sacramental, liturgical, and pastoral theology and practice.

An infrastructure was needed to guide the reform. The Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy shepherded the work for the US and provided a series of documents and study texts on music, environment and art, and all the rites. New organizations were born: the Federation of Diocesan Liturgy Commissions; The North American Forum on the Catechumenate; The National Association of Pastoral Musicians; Form Reform (architecture and environment); Preaching the Just Word, and so on, and there were conferences, study weeks, even liturgical retreats. The liturgical reform gave birth to a cottage industry. And kudos go, as well, to the publishers of books, periodicals and music who supported the growing liturgical agenda with a rich selection of materials.

But most importantly, parish communities all over the country were experiencing a completely transformed liturgy: a vastly augmented Lectionary for Sundays and weekdays; the restoration of an adult catechumenate; the integrity of the sacraments of initiation; recovery of pastoral care of the sick alongside the Church's ministry to the dying; revision of the rites of Christian burial, especially with the addition of some wonderful original texts; the development of communal rites of reconciliation; and the recovery of the centrality of Sunday and the major feasts and seasons of the liturgical year. Even more transformative was the celebration of the weekly eucharist because of the restoration of the ancient structure of word and sacraments; the restoration of the homily, not a sermon on a topic but *homilia* or heart speaking to heart; the prayers of the faithful; a rich variety of Eucharistic prayers; the exchange of peace; and communion under two species.

Above all, there was a theological underpinning to all of these ritual changes: that what we enact is the paschal mystery of Jesus' death and rising, where each one of us, priestly people through baptism, are co-presiders with Christ, the one and only High Priest and where full, conscious and active participation is the norm. You had to be there to appreciate this blessed moment in the life of the church.

Churches were renovated, music was composed, and vast throngs of lay women and men were trained in various liturgical ministries which proved to be personally transformative – one can't regularly proclaim the word, or minister the cup, or take communion to the sick, or lead the assembly in sung prayer, or accompany catechumens on their conversion journeys' without being personally and radically changed.

This is an amazing array of blessings, and an amazing foundation upon which to ground our hope for the future. But it seems important to name the underside of this rapid reform, for it was not unalloyed joy for all.

More than a decade of almost constant change and adaptation took its toll! Anthropologists would tell us ritual is extraordinarily resistant to change let alone the complete replacement of rites based on recovered theologies of ancient days. Some communities were reeling. Some communities became so resistant to anything new that I can remember hearing the introduction to the Rite of Penance, a wonderful, rich celebration of God's mercy in the context of prayer this way: "Don't worry. Nothing is really different."

There were also lots of mistakes, lots of misguided efforts, lots of outright foolishness, though I don't think anything tops the minister in St. Louis who is now inviting texting while he preaches.

In some places initial enthusiasm gave way to deep fatigue.

Meanwhile, liturgical terrorists roamed the landscape and would brook no opposition. We may have hated that joke but there is often truth in humor. For some there was only one way to do things! Period. I count myself among the certain! But I also believe, in retrospect, that a heavy-handed implementation without enough dialogue or understanding, is one reason for the conservative push back!

And nowadays everyone has an opinion and everyone is an expert. I was surprised one day recently when the presider started using the humeral veil to cover the chalice and paten and walk them in and out in procession. And just as a shudder was going through me, wondering "where is this going to lead?" a man in front of me turned to the woman at his side and said: "He's the only one who does it right." I was also present for two homilies, one which disregarded both the liturgical texts and the liturgical season, using as its starting point the words of a Christmas song illustrated by personal stories, and the other, an old fashion fire and brimstone homily on purgatory preached to octogenarians who had gathered to honor the Blessed Virgin Mary. In both instances these homilies seemed singularly inappropriate to me; in both instances I heard: "Great homily, Father." I have been forced to conclude: Maybe bright as I am, right as I am, trained as I am, I am not the measure for what touches people's minds and hearts.

What I do know is that we have a living and life-giving harvest from Vatican II. And I ask myself how, in these contentious times, can we make choices now in order to realize the future we long for. As I move to this final section, I want to begin with a story.

This past year I was present for the daily eucharist in a retirement center for my order. I was sitting in front of a woman whose speech has been virtually non-existent until very recently. Now she will ask: "who are you"? or, "are you okay"? That is the extent of it. But just after the words of institution and the presider's invitation: "Let us proclaim the mystery of faith," this woman said, loud enough for me to hear, "What do you suppose he means by that?" I was deeply moved by that question, and I thought to myself, "I don't know, not really. It is a mystery." Her question has stayed with me.

Have we lost sight of the blessings we have been given?

Have we lost sight of the mystery?

Have we been so preoccupied with the surface issues that we have missed the real reasons we gather in the first place?

### **Part III: The Future**

In this final section I want to establish a new framework for thinking about the liturgy and then suggest some concrete steps we can take to realize the future of harmony and hope we so desire.

First the framework.

A few years ago a brilliant little book by Mark Searle was published posthumously by Anne Koester and Barbara Searle, Mark's widow. The title is *Called to Participate: Theological, Ritual and Social Perspectives*. Searle revisits the meaning of "full, conscious and active participation," demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, and he distinguishes three levels of active participation which are progressively deeper and more demanding.

There is, first of all, the ritual level: the greetings and singing, the acclamations, the various postures and gestures of prayer – all the stereotyped forms of social interaction, all the written rubrics and unwritten patterns and expectations of a local community, which constitute our worship. Searle contends that most of us got stuck at this first level. Yet ritual participation is always in virtue of something else, something deeper, something more.

The second level of "active participation" is involvement in the liturgy as the **work of Christ**. In eucharist we enter into Christ's liturgy, the endless self-giving of Christ into the hands of the One he called Abba from whom he receives back his life. Human worship is an offering of our whole selves with and in Christ to God. That is our participation in the paschal mystery of Christ's obedience unto death, our identification with Christ in his radical obedience to God.

The third, and most demanding form of "active participation" is our participation in the **Trinitarian life** of God. The sacraments are the means by which those who entrust themselves to God are drawn into the divine life. Participation in the Trinitarian life is a mystery beyond telling; it is participation in the communitarian life of Father, Son and Spirit. It is life lived as sons and daughters of the Father in the Word who was begotten of the Father from all eternity and is forever of one being with the Father. It is life whose very form is the Spirit of the Holy God, poured into our hearts, flooding their depths, to draw us into the depths of God. (Searle, *Called to Participate*, passim.)

Three levels of full, conscious and active participation – participation in the ritual, participation in Jesus' death and rising, participation in the mystery of the Trinity, three progressively deeper invitations into mystery, three heart movements from the visible to the invisible, from the human to the divine. We participate in ritual prayer in order to participate in the priestly work of Christ on behalf of the world and we participate in the Trinitarian life of God and thus in God's work in human history. Full, conscious and active participation has a scope and a breadth and a depth which is breath-takingly beautiful. It also makes enormous demands on us!

I have dwelt on this topic at length because I think it gives a sure way to hope and harmony. I believe we have gotten pretty much fixated on level one, the level of the exterior ritual. And here's the result. Our energies are drained and our communities are divided by things like humeral veils – superficial choices which happen to be the least important aspect of our participation. I also believe we would advance a long way to hope and harmony in our communities if people were invited into the ever deeper mystery of participation in Jesus' death and in the mystery of being joined to the triune God – that's where we are bound together with one another; that's where we share a common mandate to lay down our lives for the life of the world.

So, I have offered you a new interpretation of full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy, and now, in conclusion, let me offer you nine concrete choices we can make right now, choices within our immediate control, choices in the present which may help us create the future we hope for:

- 1) First, we can make a decision, now, this very day, to think, study and pray about our own active participation in worship and ask for the grace to go deeper than just the ritual

level, to enter into the mystery of Jesus and into the Trinitarian life of God with humility and great faith, knowing the liturgy will place whole new demands on us. The strife among us is on the most superficial level of participation. This will shift our focus and bind us more closely with one another.

2) Second, we can choose to embrace the demands of this deeper form of participation. Eucharist

creates a new set of relationships to Christ, to the Church and to the world. It has a horizontal as well as a vertical dimension, binding us to one another with all the obligations of justice and love which being of one body entails. Minimally, it challenges our behavior toward those not of our persuasion.

3) Third, we can recognize that the introduction of a New Missal is a moment of grace for the church because a new opportunity to do careful catechesis. I have a hunch that when the Missal of Paul VI was introduced we somehow presumed that because the Missal was in English, the liturgical vision it embodied needed little catechizing. But understanding the words does not mean understanding the deeper meaning of the rites. This is an opportunity not to be squandered.

4) Fourth, we can make a choice now not to be cranky about the new translation or to disparage this word or that phrase. I have more reason than most of you in this room to wish it were otherwise. I worked for the former ICEL for nineteen years and we had neared completion of a new translation of the Missal using different translation principles. But that was then. Now I have made a conscious choice to button my lip. Being cranky, especially being perpetually cranky, sours us and keeps us in a sort of low grade depression. None of us really wants to live like that.

5) Fifth, we can listen carefully and thoughtfully to newer generations among us who simply do not understand the liturgy wars or attitudes of winning and losing. Younger members have no living memory of worship before the council. They do have a deep thirst for spirituality and they want to be free to select from our long and rich tradition without being labeled as traditionalists.

6) Sixth, and in the same vein, we need to address the uneasy relationship between liturgy and devotions or popular piety and work out a good balance for ourselves personally, as well as for our communities. As Aidan Kavanagh famously said, after Vatican II, “the eucharist became the only arrow in our liturgical quiver.” The pendulum needs to swing back to the center to make room for various forms of prayer which will nourish us between eucharists.

7) Seventh, we can actively develop generous hearts about the tastes, practices and beliefs of those with whom we do not agree. There was a fair amount of alarm in 2007 when Benedict issued the *motu proprio* clarifying the usage of the Latin Mass for those who had a deep affection for the Missal of Pius V. Some claimed it was a vindication for traditionalists. I happened to think this document suggested: “Let a thousand flowers bloom.” I hope I am right.

8) Eighth, we can choose to keep a sense of humor. Whenever we find ourselves in times of conflict and division, humor is always an important antidote. So, for example, I was so happy to be invited to join the fellowship of those with a deep affection for the Missal of Paul VI, pressing for a *motu proprio* to continue this usage.

9) Ninth, living in hope is itself a matter of choice. Do you remember Walter Bruggeman’s classic study of what he called the “prophetic imagination”? Brueggemann

claims that there are essentially two dimensions of prophecy, two ways to respond in times of conflict and division such as the age in which we find ourselves. We may choose to criticize and denounce others, or we may choose to announce a message of hope. When we think of prophecy, we often think of the first more readily, but the second is equally necessary and important.

There you have it...a vision of liturgy which moves beyond the superficial level of ritual activity into mystery, and a series of concrete choices we can make now in order to realize the future we long for.

Mark Searle used to remind us that when we gather for worship we rehearse the vision and the values of the reign of God. Each liturgy is a dress rehearsal for the great end-time banquet. And we have to rehearse again and again, over a lifetime, until we get it right, until that great day when we enter fully into the Mystery. But meanwhile, we live in hope.

In conclusion, let me offer you a final image. It is a cartoon of a Bedouin family riding across a vast desert on camels. Picture them: the father in front on a very large camel, then the mother on a camel more her size, then three children, graduated in size, the youngest at the tail end. And the youngest calls out in that whiny voice every parent knows from car trips: "Are we there yet"? And the father turns around in exasperation and says: "No, we're not there yet. We're nomads for God's sake!"

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