

Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest

Part I: An Overview

The purpose of this four part series of bulletin inserts will address the many issues that are involved in *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*. The inserts will discuss the following topics:

- what Eucharist means and the various occasions that a parish may find it necessary to implement this rite,
- how these celebrations differ from Mass,
- who leads the gathered assembly when a priest is not available,
- the various forms the rite can take.



What is *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*?

Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest, is a rite provided by the Church as a response to the need of the faithful to gather for Sunday worship even in the absence of a priest. Assemblies of this kind should not diminish but rather increase the desire of the faithful to take part in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Why does the Church gather on Sunday?

The apostles counseled people to gather on Sunday as members of Christ's body. St. Ignatius of Antioch observed that in the early Church the faithful held the Lord's Day in such high regard that they never willingly omitted its observance even in times of persecution.

The Second Vatican Council reiterated this teaching that the faithful must come together in observance of the Lord's Day. By hearing the Word of God and taking part in the Eucharist, the Paschal mystery, i.e. the passion, resurrection, and glorification of the Lord Jesus is remembered and thanksgiving is offered to God for a living hope through the resurrection of the Lord.

The assembly of the faithful manifests the Church as called by God to celebrate oneness in Christ. Together the faithful receive spiritual formation and instruction in the Paschal Mystery through the scriptures and homily. The celebration of the eucharistic sacrifice expresses the one sacrifice by Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. Hence, the Lord's Day is the primary holy day and should be celebrated in as complete a way as possible. Other celebrations should not have precedence over the Sunday celebration of Mass.

When does a parish celebrate this rite?

The Diocese of Davenport recognizes that in the exceptional case when a parish priest is absent due to sickness or some other emergency, and when another priest cannot take his place, a complete celebration of the Eucharist on Lord's Day may not be possible. At this time no planned, or scheduled celebrations in the absence of a priest may be held.

How is the rite celebrated?

The riches of Sacred Scripture and of the Church's prayer may be amply provided to the faithful in various ways apart from the Mass. Two options are provided for Sunday worship in the absence of a priest:

1. a celebration of Morning or Evening Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours;
2. a celebration of the Liturgy of the Word.

Both options may include the distribution of Holy Communion if there are a sufficient number of hosts in the tabernacle. Although our diocesan policy allows these celebrations to be held in an emergency we are reminded that these options should not be regarded as the ideal solution or as a surrender to mere convenience. There should normally be only one assembly of this kind in each place on any given Sunday.

Who are the leaders of prayer for the rite?

Through ordination the deacon has responsibility of the leading the prayer of the assembly; therefore, preference is given to the appointment of deacons as leaders of prayer when the parish gathers for one of the *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*. Lay people who have been appointed, trained and commissioned by the bishop have been given the responsibility of leading worship in the absence of a priest or deacon. The names of the parishioners who have been appointed leaders of prayer by the bishop should have been listed in your parish bulletin by now. A lay person leads the prayer of a community by virtue of the common priesthood that each Christian shares through baptism and confirmation. They should regard the office entrusted to them not so much as an honor but as a responsibility, and above all, as a service to the parish under the authority of the pastor.

Those chosen for this ministry should not merely be "volunteers." Leaders of prayer are persons who exhibit:

- a deep reverence for the Eucharist,
- a living appreciation of Scripture,
- a strong desire and ability to foster participation in worship,
- a life consistent with the Gospel,
- an exemplary moral life in good standing according to the laws of the Church,
- an active prayer life,
- active involvement in the pastoral life of the community,
- a spirit of cooperation with the members and pastoral leaders of their parish,
- acceptance by members of the community,
- a willingness to be trained and receive continued instruction for this ministry.



Next week:

Sunday Worship: Mass v. Celebrations Without a Priest

Sources: *Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, 1988
Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 1963
Office of Worship—Archdiocese of Dubuque, 2002.

Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest

Part II: Sunday Worship: The Mass v. Celebrations Without a Priest

Due to the phenomenon of the priest shortage, there may be extraordinary occasions when a priest is not available to celebrate a Mass on Sunday. When this happens, parishes need to be aware of the importance of Sunday celebration and the options available. This insert will help explain some of the underlying principles.

What is the meaning and importance of the Eucharist?

At the Last Supper Jesus instituted the eucharistic sacrifice of his body and blood. He did this to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the centuries until he comes again. Doing so, he entrusted to the Church:

- a memorial of his death and resurrection
- a sacrament of love
- a sign of unity
- a bond of charity
- a Paschal banquet



In the Mass, "the work of our redemption is carried out whenever we celebrate the memory of the sacrifice" (*Sacramentarium Veronense*, 93). Our faith instructs us that the sacrifice of the cross and its sacramental renewal in the Mass are one and the same. The Mass is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, of reconciliation and redemption.

The celebration of the Mass proclaims the mystery of the Lord's real presence under the forms of bread and wine. Christ is present at Mass not only by means of the words of consecration, but also by the spirit and expression of reverence in the worshipping community.

What is the role of the priest and the assembly?

The priest's role in the Mass is to offer the sacrifice in the person of Christ and to preside over the assembly. Ministerial priesthood sheds light on yet another reality, the royal priesthood of believers. They are a people called to offer God the prayers of the entire human family, giving thanks in Christ for the mystery of salvation by offering his sacrifice, and growing in unity by sharing Christ's body and blood.

The celebration of Mass, the action of Christ and the people of God with their specific roles or ministry, is the center of the whole Christian life. In the Mass we celebrate the work done by Christ which is offered to the Father. All other liturgical rites and all the works of the Christian life flow from, and lead to the eucharistic celebration. No other celebration can take the place of the Mass as to its meaning and effects.

Why is Sunday the Lord's Day?

By a tradition handed down from the apostles, Sunday has its origin from the very day of Christ's resurrection. On this day Christ's faithful gather so that, by hearing the Word of God and taking part in the Eucharist, they may call to mind the Paschal Mystery and give thanks to God who has restored a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest: What does it really mean?

If a priest is unavailable to preside at Mass due to extraordinary or emergency situations such as a sudden illness, the rite of *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* may be invoked. This rite includes the hearing and reflecting on the Word of God, giving thanks and praise, offering intercessions, and *may* include reception of Holy Communion. This is not a Mass and one is not obligated to attend. Nevertheless, it remains important for the faithful to gather on Sunday as a community of faith. Assemblies of this kind should not take away but should rather increase the desire of the faithful to take part in the celebration of the Eucharist.

How does this rite differ from Mass?

The primary way in which this rite differs from Mass is that even though communion *may* be distributed at this rite, the Eucharistic Prayer (which includes the consecration) is absent. The complete memorial of the Lord's sacrificial offering, as he commanded, is absent. Also missing from this celebration are:

- the priest, who acts in the person of Christ,
- the presentation of the gifts of bread and wine,
- the Eucharistic Prayer,
- the eucharistic actions of taking, giving thanks, and the breaking of the bread,
- the greetings and blessings proper to a priest when a layperson leads the prayer.



The secondary way in which this rite differs from Mass is that there is no homily, unless a deacon is the leader. If a lay person has been properly trained and has received permission from the bishop, he or she may give a reflection following the reading of the Gospel.

Next week: The roles of those who participate in *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*

Sources: *Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, 1988.
Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 1963.
Office of Worship—Archdiocese of Dubuque, 2002.

Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest

Part III: The roles of those who participate in Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest

What is the nature of Sunday worship?

In the Sunday assembly the faithful manifest the Church through active participation and a true spirit of community. Through Word and Eucharist they are renewed spiritually under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The celebration of the eucharistic sacrifice is carried out by the priest in the person of Christ. This makes the manifestation of the Paschal Mystery complete. When this is not possible, for extraordinary reasons, then Sunday worship would take one of the forms found in the rituals of *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*. These forms remain a sign of unity that may include the distribution of Holy Communion. These celebrations should increase the desire of the faithful to be present at and participate in the celebration of the Eucharist.

What are the roles of those who participate in *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*?

By virtue of their baptism the faithful have various roles as they actively participate in Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest.

The Assembly - The assembly actively participates through singing, responding, listening, reflecting and praying.

The Deacon - A deacon leads the assembly in prayer because by the nature of his office the deacon has been given orders to proclaim and preach the Gospel. If a community does not have the service of a deacon then trained lay leaders may lead the gathered assembly.

Lay Leaders - Lay persons are called forth, appointed, trained and commissioned as leaders of prayer for their parish community.

Greeters - The greeters welcome and serve those who gather.

Servers - The servers assist the leader.

Lector - The lector proclaims God's Word through the proclamation of Sacred Scripture.

Musicians - The musicians lead the assembly in singing the songs and acclamations.

Extraordinary Ministers of Communion - The Extraordinary Ministers of Communion assist if Holy Communion is included.



What are distinctive features of *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*?

In either form of the Sunday celebration without a priest, the following distinctions should be kept in mind by those responsible for planning the celebration:

- A deacon or lay person is called the "leader."
- The deacon always wears the vestments proper to his office. The lay leader is vested in an alb or other suitable clothing according to the diocesan policy.
- The leader will always be assisted by other ministers (as listed on the previous page).
- The lay leader does not use words, rites, gestures, and texts that are readily associated with the Mass, such as greetings and blessings proper to a priest or a deacon, i.e. "The Lord be with you" and "May Almighty God bless you."
- The Eucharistic Prayer is never prayed as a whole or in part.
- The lay leader does not make the sign of the cross over the people.
- The lay leader may use a blessing proper to a lay person from the *Book of Blessings*
- The lay leader's chair must be different than the presider's chair.
- The assigned readings of the Sunday Lectionary are used.
- A lay person who has been properly trained and has received authorization from the bishop, may give a reflection on the Scripture readings, or a message from the pastor may be shared.
- Candles may be used in entrance procession, by the ambo, and at the altar when it is time to bring consecrated hosts from the place of reservation.



Next week: Forms of the *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*.

Sources: *Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, 1988.
Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 1963.
Office of Worship—Archdiocese of Dubuque, 2002.

Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest

Part IV: Forms of the Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest

Two options for Sunday worship are provided when a priest is absent due to sickness or some other emergency, and when another priest cannot take his place.

1. Morning or Evening Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours
2. A Liturgy of the Word

Both options may include the distribution of Holy Communion.



Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer

Morning and Evening Prayer have the same structure and the following elements:

Introductory Rites - The *Invitation to Prayer* and a *hymn* serve to gather the faithful into a worshipping community.

Psalmody - The singing or recitation of *psalms* and *canticles*, along with their respective *antiphons* and *psalm-prayers*, permits the assembly to join its praise and thanksgiving to God to that of Christ, who is our great high priest and advocate.

Liturgy of the Word - The *Scripture readings* assigned in the *Lectionary for Mass* are proclaimed. It brings to those gathered in faith the good news of salvation and redemption in Christ.

A brief *reflection* on the readings may be given by the leader if authorized by the bishop or their pastor; a reflection prepared by the pastor may be read; or there may be a period of silence for reflection on what has been proclaimed. A deacon will preach a homily.

The *response* of the assembly to the Word of God is a combination of thanksgiving for God's goodness to us (*Canticle of Zechariah* in Morning Prayer or *Canticle of Mary* in Evening Prayer), and of *Intercession* for the needs of the Church and the world.

Communion Rite - If Holy Communion is not distributed, this portion of the rite is omitted.

The *Lord's Prayer* is recited or sung, a *sign of peace* is exchanged, and the leader goes to the altar for the *invitation to communion*. The assembly unites itself to the Paschal Mystery of Christ and with those who are able to celebrate the Eucharist on that particular day through the reception of Holy Communion. The leader then says the proper *Prayer after Communion*.

The Lord's Prayer - The Lord's Prayer is always recited or sung by all, even if Holy Communion is not distributed.

Concluding Rite - Before the dismissal of the assembly, *announcements* relating to the life of the parish are read. The *collection of monetary gifts* of the assembly may also be done at this time. The assembly is *sent forth* with *God's blessing* to live the Christian life. A *recessional hymn* is sung.

A Liturgy of the Word

A Sunday celebration of the Liturgy of the Word includes the following elements:

Introductory Rites - The purpose of these rites is to gather the faithful into a community and to prepare them to celebrate. They are *welcomed, invited to prayer, and an appropriate hymn is sung*

Liturgy of the Word - God speaks to the gathered assembly through the *Scripture readings* assigned in the *Lectionary for Mass*, disclosing to them the mystery of redemption and salvation.

A brief *reflection* on the readings may be given by the leader if authorized by the bishop or their pastor; a reflection prepared by the pastor may be read; or there may be a period of silence for reflection on what has been proclaimed. A deacon will preach a homily.

The people respond through the *profession of faith* and the *general intercessions*.

Thanksgiving - The community blesses God for the gift of redemption in Christ. This can be done by use of a *psalm, a hymn, a canticle, litany, or a prayer*. It should not take the form of a Eucharistic Prayer or its preface.

Communion Rite - If Holy Communion is not distributed, this portion of the rite is omitted.

The *Lord's Prayer* is recited or sung, a *sign of peace* is exchanged, and the leader goes to the altar for the *invitation to communion*. The assembly unites itself to the Paschal Mystery of Christ and with those who are able to celebrate the Eucharist on that particular day through the *reception of Holy Communion*. The leader then says the proper *Prayer after Communion*.

The Lord's Prayer - The Lord's Prayer is always recited or sung by all, even if Holy Communion is not distributed.

Concluding Rites - Before the dismissal of the assembly, announcements relating to the life of the parish are read. The *collection of monetary gifts* of the assembly may also be done at this time. The *blessing and dismissal* connect the liturgy and the Christian life. A *recessional hymn* is sung.

▪ Specific Norms

- In both forms of these options for Sunday worship the leader and those responsible for planning the celebration should keep in mind the following points.
- The person who leads the community, whether a deacon or lay person, is called a "*leader*."
- The lay leader may be vested in lay clothing or an alb.
- The use of stole and dalmatic is reserved to deacons.
- Lay persons are to avoid all things proper to a priest or deacon. They do not use the greetings before the Gospel nor any of the other greetings designated for a deacon or priest. Nor do they use the priestly or diaconal forms of blessing. When giving a blessing, a lay person does not make the sign of the cross over the people.
- A lay person may impart any blessings given in the *Book of Blessing* which are not reserved to a bishop, priest, or deacon.



Sources: *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest: Leaders' Edition*, 1989.
Office of Worship—Archdiocese of Dubuque, 2002.