

The Liturgy

Do Justice in Word and Bread

There is a marvelous old Jewish story called "Joseph Who Loved The Sabbath" based on eight lines of Aramaic in the Babylonian Talmud, which ends with "He who lends to the Sabbath, the Sabbath repays him."

✦ Once upon a time there was a poor man who worked hard all week. He waited all week for one day, the Sabbath. All week he slaved so that he could buy good things to celebrate the Sabbath. His name was Joseph. In fact, everyone called him Joseph who loves the Sabbath.

Joseph worked for a wealthy landowner, a mean-spirited, greedy man named Sorab. Joseph sweated in the fields, planted the seeds, harvested the crops, milked the animals, pressed the oil, picked the grapes, and took care of Sorab's household. For all that Sorab paid him a pittance.

After many years Joseph asked for more, saying it was necessary and just, because he worked so hard all week. But Sorab laughed and wouldn't hear of it. He would sit in the shade, sip his cool drink and say, "Oh, it's hot today," as he watched Joseph work in the sun.

Still Joseph worked all week to remember the Sabbath. As soon as he was done on Friday afternoon, he raced home to his small house, quickly putting it in order and cleaning it. He ran out to the market to buy what was needed to celebrate the Sabbath. He bought only the best, the freshest. He went from stall to stall, looking intently, choosing oil, flour, candles, wine. He would pick a plump fresh chicken or a freshly caught fish. He paid high. A merchant might ask others near him, "Is this a wealthy man?" And one of Joseph's old friends in the market would laugh and call back: "No, that's just Joseph. He loves the Sabbath!"

Then Joseph would go home, change out of his work clothes, and put on his best shirt and gather his tallit (prayer shawl). He set his house to welcome the Sabbath, fixing the bread and wine, cooking the fish or chicken, and, as the stars rose in the sky, he would light the candles and sing. That night he would sing the psalms, read the scriptures, and meditate. He would have a bit of wine, toast the Almighty, eat some bread, enjoy his meal, and sing the hymns of praise and adoration, thanking God, blessed be His Name. Then he would sleep. The next day he would share what was left of his meal with others: people from the market stalls, other families who worked as hard as he did all week, and strangers. Together they would sing the songs of freedom and read the stories of Exodus, eat, play with the children, and enjoy the Sabbath rest. And then, as the stars again rose in the sky, Joseph would reluctantly put away his candlesticks and tallit, sing a last song, and go to sleep to face the week ahead. The Sabbath was over for another week.

This was Joseph's life, week after week, year after year. Nothing changed. No matter how hard Joseph worked, Sorab only paid him his pittance. And Joseph waited for Sabbath and celebrated, reluctant to let go of the day of rest and *shalom*.

But then one night Sorab had a dream. An angel with bright wings, huge and awesome, came to him and sang: "Sorab! Sorab! All you have, your house and lands, have come to you from Joseph's hands. Before this month's full moon grows dim, all you have will belong to him!" The angel sang it over and over. Sorab woke up sweating and shaking. No! Never would that happen.

But as the hours passed he calmed down and forgot it; after all, it was just a dream. But the next night the angel came again and sang all night. Sorab was shaken and upset. He worried about it all day, wondering what to do. Again the third night the angel came and sang over and over: "Sorab! Sorab! All you have, your house and lands, have come to you from Joseph's hands. Before this month's full moon grows dim, all you have will belong to him!" Sorab awoke cursing and yelling, "No! Never!"

That morning Sorab set off into town and sold his house, lands, estates, animals, harvest, even his slaves, for a huge amount of money. He then bought a ticket to another land, where he had friends and business associates. He would be able to live in peace and not worry about singing angels and the specter of Joseph. Then, realizing he couldn't carry all this money with him, he went to a jeweler. He looked at all the great stones: diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, ru-

bies, opals. They were stunning and exquisite. Finally he settled on a large bright red ruby and had it sewn into the folds of his turban. He was set. That very night on board ship, as the moon waned above him, he sailed out to find his new life. He shook his finger at the sky and cried out: "Never, never will Joseph get what I own, the moon can wane and dreams can sing, but I go now to better things." And the ship sailed.

The next morning Joseph came to work as he always did to find out that he had a new master and that life had changed. But he still worked hard for a small pittance and hungered for the Sabbath to come so that he could pray and rest and feast with his friends and neighbors. Out on the sea Sorab's ship ran into a storm, a terrible one, and those on board prayed for their lives. In the midst of the waves crashing and the wind furiously blowing Sorab went overboard, never to be seen again. But it would be years before word of his death came again to his homeland.

Joseph labored, and the Sabbath came again. He ran home as always, cleaned his house, went to the market, bought fresh oil and flour, long tapers, and a bit of herbs and seasonings. Then he rushed from stall to stall to find a succulent chicken or fish for his Sabbath meal. As he passed the fish stall, the vendor cried out: "Joseph! Joseph! Look what I have for you! A great fish, fresh. Your friend Judith told me to save it for you. It's perfect for this Sabbath." Joseph agreed and bought the fish. Home he went, to make his bread, cook his fish, and change his clothes. The stars rose in the sky and found Joseph praying, singing, and chanting the psalms and praise of God, nibbling on a bit of bread, blessing the wine cup, and reading the scriptures, remembering all that God, blessed be His Name, had done for all God's people. Then he ate his dinner, savoring the bread and fish and wine, and lo and behold! what should he find but a stone, a large, bright, shining ruby, inside the belly of his fish! He couldn't believe his eyes. He put the stone aside and continued with his prayers and psalms and slept well that night, full of dreams of angels and ships and all his friends and neighbors feasting.

The next morning he gathered with his friends, the people from the market stalls, strangers, and the children, and they prayed, studied the Torah together, played, and sang ancient melodies of thanksgiving and praise as the day slipped away. The stars rose in the sky and everyone went home. Joseph put away his tallit and prepared to go back to work again.

But the next morning he took his stone and went to the market place and sold it to the jeweler for just enough money to buy Sorab's lands, estates, animals, and servants. Then he worked hard all week. Sabbath came, and he went quickly to the market to buy candles, wine, flour, oil, herbs and spices, a white tablecloth, and many fish and chickens. He ran home and quickly cooked everything and made many loaves of bread. Then, as the stars rose, he sat quietly, wrapped in his prayer shawl and good clothes, and prayed, pouring over the Torah portions, singing the goodness of God, blessed be His Name, and went to sleep.

The next morning the word spread and all gathered at Joseph's house: his friends and neighbors, workers from the market stalls, the jeweler, strangers from the street, those passing through town. All feasted at Joseph's table. Joseph who loved the Sabbath told the story of the ruby in his Sabbath fish and how generous and good God is, blessed be His Name.

They say that everyone was welcome and treated justly at Joseph's house, and there was always something extra for the children and the beggars and the strangers from the street. Joseph still loved the Sabbath. He worked hard all week, but he couldn't wait to honor the Sabbath and tell the stories of what God had done for God's people. Joseph who loved the Sabbath was always grateful and always full of joy.

The story is grand and simple, filled with truth. It is a story about justice, about the worship of God, and about God's care for the poor, as well as care for the poor by the poor, which honors God. It is about giving thanks and a way of life that is daily gathered up and given to God on the Sabbath. The story is about rest, prayer, contemplation, reflection, word, thanksgiving, and eating both alone and with others as celebration. But it is also about remembering what God has done, is doing, and still wants to do for God's people and for putting the world back together again the way it's supposed to be, the way God created it to be. It reminds us that everything is connected: the fish, the sea, the ruby, dreams of angels and the spirit world, the moon, weather, neighbors, friends, the poor and the rich, work and rest, children, and food. They form intimate relationships, whether we are conscious of those ties or not, or, like Sorab, resistant to them and intent on severing them so that we can escape responsibility and community. The story sings of only the best for God and only the best for the poor, saying that the way

we work, spend money, and worship, as well as do justice and charity, is all one piece. Fasting, feasting, praying, singing, celebrating, especially with others, are ways to share God with one another. Our Sabbath, our eucharist of word and food, is not so different from Joseph's.

There are, at root, five elements that are needed for liturgy. In the order of importance and meaning they are the people, the bread and wine, the word, a collection for the poor, and a priest. Liturgy, the worship of our God, is the work of the people, our primary work all week, which culminates on Sunday when we gather. We sign ourselves with the cross and welcome one another with peace and begin by telling the stories of the presence of Jesus the Christ with us, risen and glorious, and of the great acts the Spirit continues to do in those who believe. We break open the word and break open our lives, break open our communities in reflection, song, and exhortation. We ask for forgiveness and recommit ourselves to the word of hope, the good news, as the substance of our living alone and together. Then we stand on our words of belief in the creed and offer our words, lives, bodies and souls, hearts and dreams, communities, resources, and even our lacks and sins as gifts to be transformed and given back to us by God. Then we tell the story again, the story of what the Father has done for us in Jesus through the power of the Spirit, and we call down that Spirit on our gifts of bread and wine and our offering for the poor. We break our bread and share our wine, and we break open our lives so that God can rush in with forgiveness, peace, hope, and life. Then the doors are broken open and we rush out to be word to others, to tell the story and let it come true in us, to be the bread, to be the wine, to be the body of Christ for a hungry, yearning world—to do justice and walk humbly with our God. We "do this and remember." We remember God, who we are, what we promised in our baptism, and God's covenant with us. We remember and make Jesus present in the community that gathers, in the word proclaimed, in the offerings and gifts given for the needy, in the bread and wine and eucharist, which is the gift returned to us. The liturgy overflows with the presence of the risen Lord, and we seep out into the world like leaven in bread, like balm for all pain and sorrow, like abiding peace with justice, like glory's radiant reflection.

The liturgy reminds us that we are known by the stories we tell and the company we keep. The word *company* is that used to describe those who became disciples of Jesus, "going off in his company." It is a rich and dense word, with the root meaning "to break bread together," "to share and eat together." But in our society and culture it also is an economic term. We are known by those we eat with, what we do with our

money, and the stories we tell that come true in our lives, relationships, and structures. This storytelling and sharing of a meal reconcile us and forgive us, heal us and strengthen us. Among those who pass the cup and the bread, and share the word, there can be no divisions, only communion, only walking together again. We grasp hold of hope in the word of God and in the bread handed to us. We eat it, become it, and take it outside to share. It is the bread of justice that makes restitution and restores the world and our own lives, broken by sin and evil and injustice.

There are many images of eucharist. One that recurs is that of the beggar. We are all beggars in the presence of God, and so beggars are to be treated with special care and tenderness. Charles Peguy says: "Oh, if only we'd remember that before God we are all equal—begging with empty bowls." Those who went home from Jesus' feeding of the four and five thousand went home filled. The disciples picked up the leftovers. What did they do with them? Who got them? Did children, the old, the sick, and people who had never met each other before take them? Leftovers—the food of the poor.

We are the leftovers of God's feasting. We are a meal shared, bread blessed and broken, and wine drunk together, passed around. We become what we eat, and others feed on us, just as we feed on God. Liturgy is a celebration of resurrection, of the presence of the risen Lord, and a hint of God's coming in glory again. It is service, another way of washing feet, of bending before one another, of committing ourselves to the practice of the corporal works of mercy, of suffering with and for one another. It is memory—"Do this." Like the woman in the gospel, we too will be remembered for what we do for the poor, for those facing suffering and death, for God. It is thanksgiving. Eucharist means gratitude poured out, given away, yet it always is returned to us, a lifestyle of bending before God and one another because of the Incarnation and all that God does for us. It makes the story come true. It is the telling of the truth that constitutes who we are and our relationships in the Trinity and in community; it reconstitutes us in forgiveness and mercy.

The liturgy is full of words and full of stories, invitations, petitions and prayers. But it is also silence, what is between the words. Its attitudes and gestures speak volumes. Just as in John's gospel, the word is presented most clearly by acting it out, by Jesus presenting himself as a slave before his disciples, kneeling before them and washing their feet. Liturgy is a "feet-first" way of life. It is anonymous service, with bent head and shoulders, concentrating on the feet of others. It is giving because of others' need and our own gratitude for what has been shared so fully with us. This is our worship: doing for and with others what we

would like to do for God, because God keeps doing marvelous things for us. It is the place too where God hungers for us, where Jesus reminds us how to hunger and thirst for justice. The liturgy makes community. We need others to tell the stories, to listen with, to make dreams flesh, to pass the word on to. As Paul said, "I pass on to you exactly what I heard and was given" (1 Cor 11:23, *NAB*).

The words of Jesus, these words of our tradition, remake the world and refashion us in the image of the crucified and risen One, the compassionate One, son of God, our brother. This is our family, and we feed on dreams, eat together, and become what we proclaim, so that others may come to gather with us. There is always room at the table for more, and God comes in the guise of the stranger, the poor, the outcast, the forgotten, the beggar, the prophet. The way we eat at liturgy and the way we eat daily reveal who we are and how we worship. Our liturgical ritual only extends what is already happening. When we gather, God rests with us and listens to us tell God's stories and our own, and God remembers us and puts the world back together as it was in the beginning, is becoming now, and will be forever. This is what puts flesh and blood on our bones and breathes spirit and life into us, so we can get up from the table and go forth together, sent into the world by Jesus, as the Father sent him to us, spirited, fed, at peace, and in communion.

An old story from India tells it well:

✦ Once upon a time there was a good man. He was a hunter and good at it. He fed his family, his relations, and many poor and needy people, and sometimes he sold the leftovers in the market so that he could get other things for his family. One day when he was out hunting he saw something most unusual. He came upon a fox with only two legs. He had heard of foxes like this one, and he wondered how it had managed to survive. It could barely drag itself around. How could it hunt? Was it alone? The stories told of foxes that loved their freedom so dearly that if they were caught in a steel trap they would chew their leg off to get free. He stood and watched this fox, amazed. It had chewed itself free twice and was still alive.

As the hunter mused over the determination of the fox, he was startled to see a tiger come out of the forest into the clearing. It was dragging a half-eaten carcass of a deer. It had obviously eaten its fill and now left the carcass for the fox to eat. The hunter had never seen anything like this before in his life. Were the animals so careful of each other that they tended to the needs of the weaker and the lame? The fox ate its fill and dragged himself off, leaving the rest of the

carcass for the smaller animals to finish. Nothing was wasted. The man thought about this for a long time.

Even when he went home, it weighed on his mind. He was a very religious man and was sure that God was trying to tell him something. He went back to the forest the next day and hid, looking for the fox and the tiger to see if it would happen once again. He learned over days and weeks that it did, but only as needed, only when the fox was hungry. He was sure now that God was teaching him a great wisdom and truth. He prayed and thought and finally decided that he must learn the ways of the animals, especially of the fox: how to trust a natural enemy; how to trust that God would take care of him; how to wait for another to give to him. It was very hard. It did not come easily to the man.

He stopped hunting. No longer did he bring food home to his family and relations, his neighbors and the poor. He became poorer, along with his family and others. His wife begged him to go hunting, and he looked at her sadly, knowing that he couldn't and thinking that he couldn't explain to her what he saw in the forest. She would never believe him, yet he knew from his reflection and prayer that God was teaching him. Eventually his wife and children left him so that they could find something to eat, a way to live without him. Others shied away from him, wondering what had happened to him.

He grew weaker and weaker without food and prayed earnestly to know what to do. He worked at trust and being open to what others might bring. He came close to death. At the very end an angel came to him. He was overjoyed and heartened to see this presence of light before him. The angel looked at him long and hard and said: "Why are you so stupid? Why aren't you hunting and taking care of others? You were given a vision of what you were doing and should do, that all should do. Get up and stop thinking of yourself as the fox. Remember: you are the tiger!"

The liturgy reminds us to stop thinking of ourselves as the needy ones but to see we are the tigers! It reminds us to feed the lame and lost, the suffering, those aching for freedom and a life lived with others. God provides for us with lavish gifts; the body and blood of Jesus. We, children of this God who remains with us as food, are to do the same and let others feed on us. We are all tigers for the foxes and the folk of the world. Remember! "Do this and remember me!"

5. Edward Schillebeeckx, "A Creative Retrospect," in *Minister, Pastor, Prophet? Grassroots Leadership in the Churches*, ed. Grollenberg et al. (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 63.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p. 74.
8. Mary Collins, "The Public Language of Ministry," *Official Ministry in a New Age*, ed. James Provost (Washington, D.C.: Canon Law Society of America, 1981), p. 36.
9. *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 31 and 36, see also nos. 23, 25 and 28, in Walter M. Abbott, S.J., ed., *Documents of Vatican II* (New York: The America Press, 1966).
10. David Power, "The Basis for Official Ministry in the Church," in Provost, p. 62.
11. Joseph Komonchak, "Clergy, Laity and the Church's Mission in the World," in Provost, p. 168.
12. "Pope John Paul II, Opening Address at the Puebla Conference (January 28, 1979)," *Puebla and Beyond*, ed. John Eagleson and Philip Scharper (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979), p. 69.
13. John Paul II, "Address to Priests in Mexico City," *Origins* 8 (1979) pp. 548-49.
14. James Provost, "Toward a Renewed Canonical Understanding of Official Ministry," in Provost, pp. 198-99.

10 Rites: What If . . . ?

1. Francis Sullivan, S.J., *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist, 1983), p. 185.
2. Ibid., pp. 185-86. DV refers to *Verbum Dei* and LG refers to *Lumen Gentium*.
3. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), pp. 30-32.
4. "Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith," *Origins* 12 (1982), pp. 457ff.
5. Joan Chittister, Address to Catholic School Educators, *Origins* 14/4 (1984), pp. 54-55.
6. Daniel Berrigan, *Katallagete* (Spring 1978).
7. Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, cited in Richard Gula, *What Are They Saying about Moral Norms?* (New York: Paulist, 1982), p. 43.

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1. *Tractate Shabbat*, 119A. The story is found in *A Thousand and One Nights* as "The Devout Israelite," and in Emanuel bin Gorion's *Mimekor Yisrl: Classical Jewish Folktales*. Note: I heard this story told once orally and remembered the initial rhyme sequence and outline. I was told that there is a children's book that has many elements of this version.