

## Prayer of the Faithful

The new *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM 2007), which has come into force this year, is a document with which every deacon should become familiar. Chapter IV, Part B sets out the form of the celebration of Mass with a deacon. In this short article we will consider the Prayer of the Faithful.

It is a ministry of the deacon to proclaim the intentions of the Prayers of the Faithful (GIRM §171 d). A lay person may read these prayers if there is no deacon present (GIRM §138). Proclaiming these prayers is properly a diacanal ministry. A deacon is not taking a lay persons ministry when he prays these prayers in the name of the congregation. The situation is parallel to the priest reading the Gospel only in the absence of a deacon.

Before a deacon commences his ministry in a parish it would be ideal if all of the parts that a deacon has in the liturgy are made known to the congregation and explained. Because deacons have not been a regular part of the celebration of Mass for some time it is possible that misunderstandings could develop and lay people may consider, wrongly, that the deacon is taking *their* ministry. From a purely practical and pastoral point of view we must be sensitive to the reality of Sunday Mass experienced by most Catholics since Vatican II that has had lay people reading these prayers. It is only natural that they may assume that it is their ministry.

If it is not possible to outline all his parts in the liturgy, before he commences his appointment, then it may be advisable for the deacon to refrain initially from proclaiming the intentions for the first month or two of ministry. Then through the newsletter or other means, some communication of the deacons role in regard to these prayers could be explained. Then he can take up what is his proper role.

In most parishes, where there is more than one Mass it is unlikely that a deacon will be at all of them. When he is not present lay people would continue to proclaim the intentions at Mass.

### Why these prayers?

The Prayers of the Faithful bring the concerns of the world and the wider church into the life of the assembly. It is a concrete expression of *Gaudium et Spes* §1 that the joy and hope, the grief and anxiety of women and men of our time are those of the followers of Christ. In fact nothing that is genuinely human fails to find and echo in their hearts.

In the ordination of a bishop he is reminded that his care extends not only to the Catholics of the diocese over which he is head but it extends to all who live within his territory. He should have a care and concern for all people, and this finds expression through his regulation of education and welfare services often in collaboration with Religious Institutes and lay organisations such as Saint Vincent De Paul. Each bishop is joined in bonds of communion with all other bishops and their churches and so he will have concern for their welfare too.

Deacons express their close connection with the ministry of the bishop in praying these prayers in the assembly. The proclamation by the deacon connects the as-

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sembly with the head of their church, the bishop, and through him to the care of the wider community.

Praying the intentions of these prayers is a parallel to the deacons' sending the community on mission at the end of the Mass. In announcing the intentions he brings the concerns of the assembly, the local church, the wider

church and the world into the midst of the assembly. At the conclusion of Mass he sends the community out into the wider church and world in the hope that they will address some of the needs for which they have prayed.



### What to pray.

Some parishes use prayer intentions from books which are purchased for this purpose. GIRM §71 indicates that they in fact should be composed freely, prudently and be succinct. They should be the prayer of the whole assembly. Perhaps the deacon along with lay members of the parish could take responsibility for composing them. A prayer intention box could be placed at the back of the church to gather some specific intentions from time to time.

Books of prayer intentions might be useful for developing guidelines as to the forms of the prayer but over reliance on them for Sunday worship may make them too generic to be the prayer of the whole assembly.

As a general rule four categories should be included in the prayers; the needs to the church, the world, for those burdened by special needs and for the local community (GIRM §70). There is scope to reflect the liturgical season and special events in civic life.

### How to pray.

After the Creed the deacon proceeds to the ambo and if he passes the altar he should bow. The prayers should be simple in form and allow the congregation to hear clearly for whom we are praying, what we are praying for and allow a brief moment to pause and reflect before moving onto the next intention. The presider introduces and concludes the prayer from his chair, while the deacon faces him. When the congregation respond Amen the deacon returns to his chair.