

# Celebrating the Liturgy of the Word with Children

In 2006 the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) issued a booklet of *GUIDELINES FOR CELEBRATING THE LITURGY OF THE WORD WITH CHILDREN.*

The booklet aims to help parishes enhance and enrich children's experience of the Liturgy of the Word. All of us in the parish would do well to read this document and consider its suggestions.

In general, the document reminds us that the Liturgy of the Word for Children is not a substitute for Sunday school; it is not primarily a moment for catechesis. Rather, the Liturgy of the Word for Children is a component of the ritual prayer of Mass just as it is for adults. Learning may take place during the Liturgy of the Word but it is in the context of liturgical prayer. In fact, the Children's Liturgy of the Word should never be seen as separate from the Mass. It should flow with and in the greater celebration of the Sunday Mass. Although the children may be in a different space for the liturgy of the Word, we should not think of them as having been dismissed from the assembly. For the majority of the time, the children should be with the assembly at Sunday liturgy. When they are elsewhere, it is to enhance their inclusion in the liturgy, not separate them from it.

The CCCB booklet offers guidelines, which should be seen and used as such. All parishes are different and what works well in one may not work well in another. Yet, it would be good for all parishes to consider the guidelines and the reasons behind them before deciding to deviate from them.

Here are some highlights from the booklet for you to consider:

## What is it?

Children's Liturgy is about breaking open the Word of God for little people. Who are these little people? In this book we are looking specifically at children ages 4 to 8 and how we can help them better understand the Word of God.

## When should we send them?

The usual place to send children, according to #67, is after the Opening Prayer. If the sending takes place at this point, there is no need to say another Opening Prayer; the priest has already recited one on behalf of all to prepare our hearts and minds to listen to God's Word and reflect upon it. If you choose to begin the Children's Liturgy with an Opening Prayer, consider sending the children after the welcome and before the Opening Prayer.

## How often should we send them?

#62 in the booklet tells us that the separate liturgy of the word should neither be random nor scheduled weekly. Your parish should discern when are the best times to celebrate this ritual. Consider the context of the liturgical year and remember the advantages of consistency. Still, #74 reminds us that for pastoral reasons you might need or want to offer Children's Liturgy of the Word at all Sunday Masses.

## How do we send them?

# 67 tells us that the children should be gathered and sent in a patterned and predictable way. A "praise refrain" could be sung to accompany the sending. Anything cutesy or resembling a mini-homily should be avoided. The priest should not bless the children as a blessing at this juncture would resemble a dismissal. Remember, the children will return and receive the final blessing at the conclusion of Mass with the rest of the assembly.

## When should they return?

This is the easy part: They left for the Liturgy of the Word, which ends with the prayer of the Faithful, therefore, they should return right after the Prayer of the Faithful. The children should be always be present for the Liturgy of the Eucharist in its entirety.

## What should the liturgy look like?

On page 47 the booklet offers an outline of how the Liturgy with the children might flow. This outline is a suggestion; some days you might want to use only the Gospel reading and not two readings. Regardless, you should always proclaim the Gospel reading. Do not replace the readings with anything other than the Sunday readings. Only use the children's lectionary. If possible, sing the Gospel Acclamation before the Gospel. Begin with an Opening Prayer, if the children were sent before the prayer with the assembly, otherwise, just begin with the reading. Close with the Prayers of the Faithful, allowing children to offer their own intentions.

## What about the Children's Lectionary?

Instead of enthroning the lectionary, as described in #79, we would recommend having the leader come forward with the lectionary at the time the children are sent. Do not include the children's lectionary in procession at the beginning of Mass; only the Gospel book should be carried in procession.

## What do you say to the children after the readings?

There is a very nice section in the booklet on creating a homiletic reflection. This section can help keep the leaders focused on reflection rather than lecture. One good idea is a dialogue with the children; it takes talent but getting the little people to reflect back what they heard and understood can be very helpful to others. Craft or art-type activities are largely

discouraged but can be effective if they are intimately tied to the feast of the day, and judiciously prepared to become part of the children's experience of worship.

Get "*CELEBRATING THE LITURGY OF THE WORD WITH CHILDREN, CCCB*"

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