

The Prayers of the Faithful and the Announcements at Mass

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A faithful deacon combines pastoral care with liturgical ministry. The Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church famously named three responsibilities of the deacon: "the service of the liturgy, of the Gospel and of works of charity." In three distinct parts of the mass, the deacon may directly connect his pastoral care with the liturgy. Obviously, he can do this any time he preaches out of his own experience of service to the community. However, two other parts of the mass are opportunities often overlooked: the universal prayer (or the prayer of the faithful) and the announcements.

For the prayer of the faithful, someone has to announce the petitions. It may be a deacon, cantor, reader or any layperson. Ideally, the priest does not list these intentions. He opens the series with an announcement to the people, and he concludes it with an oration. The person naming the petitions addresses the gathered faithful each time ("Let us pray to the Lord"), and the faithful address their words to God ("Lord, hear our prayer.") Hence, these petitions are the prayer *of the faithful*. The people of God exercise their baptismal ministry by doing something that the ordained priest does for most of the rest of the mass: They pray. So, the people pray, and anyone except the priest may announce the intentions. For that responsibility, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal seems to favor the deacon (177).

Near the end of the mass, it isn't clear who is supposed to make the announcements, but in one place the General Instruction again favors the deacon (184), unless the priest prefers to do it himself. The announcements are supposed to be brief, and given only "if they are necessary" (GIRM 90). Normally they are. But they should not include matters that do not directly pertain to the community gathered for the sacred actions of the mass.

Why is the deacon recommended as the speaker for the prayer of the faithful and the announcements at the end of mass? The reasons are both historical and theological. The fourth-century *Apostolic Constitutions* have the deacon list intentions for catechumens, energumens (those with various disturbances), penitents, and the faithful. An eighth-century order of service called *Ordo Romanus I* had the archdeacon announce some practical matters just before the distribution of communion: the date for the next eucharist, the name of the church where it would be celebrated, and its location inside or outside the walls of Rome (108). (Announcements now should be made after the prayer after communion - not before communion. *Ordo Romanus I* makes one wonder if the announcement had to be made early because people were leaving mass right after receiving communion clear back in the eighth century!)

In addition to these historical documents, there is possibly a theological meaning. This is pure speculation, but deacons may be listing intentions and making announcements because of the connection between the pastoral care he gives and the liturgical gathering he serves. If the deacon was involved with feeding the hungry and caring for the poor each week, who better than he would know what prayer intentions need to be brought to the local community? If the deacon helps the management of the liturgy and the outreach of the parish, who better than he should announce the events of the upcoming week?

Deacons could profitably think about the blending of his liturgical and pastoral roles in this way. They will be better able to prepare or deliver the prayer of the faithful if they are in touch with the needs of the local and universal church, and of the neighborhood and the world. The General Instruction lists four different categories for these intentions: the needs of the Church, public authorities and the salvation of the whole world, those burdened by any difficulty, and the local community (70). Each week, the deacon could spend time prayerfully reflecting on these categories, in order to discern what specifically needs the prayer of the faithful.

Many times the first petition is offered for the pope and the local bishop - but both of these men receive mention by name in the eucharistic prayer of every mass every day. For the first intention, the deacon could consider the entire Church. How does the Church throughout the world need prayer today? Then he could consider civil authorities and people in need of salvation. Who are they? How should we pray for those who govern us this week? Specifically who might need our prayers for salvation? Has the deacon met some people this week who fit that category?

Third, the deacon could consider those burdened by difficulties, especially those to whom he has ministered since last Sunday. What groups should be included in prayers this week? Finally, he may consider the local community - the groups and committees who will be gathering this week. How shall the entire community assist them with prayer?

For the deacon to enter into the prayer of the faithful, he should have a good awareness of the joys and sorrows of the Church throughout the world, the political situation at home and abroad, the burdens that individuals carry, and the names and faces of local people in need of the community's prayer. He doesn't have to name names. But when he composes or leads the prayer of the faithful, people should be able to tell from the sound of his voice and the choice of his words that he has thought about these matters. As part of his diaconal service, from the same heart, he now presents them for the community's consideration.

The announcements generally pertain to activities in the local community for the upcoming week. For the deacon to compose or proclaim the announcements, he should ideally be familiar with all the activities that will be listed. Has he met the members of the committees gathering this week? Does he know the details of the special liturgical services being offered? Has he been informed about special activities happening in the social life of the community? Is

he prepared to tell people what they need to know about the following week's liturgy?

For the deacon to make precise and helpful announcements, he should have a good awareness of everything that happens in the parish. He need not be present for all the events, but he should know about the people who will gather, and how to answer further questions that members may pose after the service. If he himself is actively involved in serving others through this parish, people will hear this familiarity in his voice, as he invites people into the events to come. He should speak with authority and familiarity about all the service of the parish, for which he acts as a model.

The prayer of the faithful and the announcements are two parts of the mass in which the deacon may take the lead. His leadership will be more authentic if he speaks from his experience of service. In the prayer of the faithful, he will bring the fruit of his service and prayer the past week, and in the announcements he will invite people to serve with him in the week ahead.

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