

“I’m the wrong guy” is a reaction I’ve had many times in my life when people told me their idea of what I should do. In 1983 when I told Sant’ Anselmo professor Ghislain Lafont that I’d write my doctoral dissertation about any sacrament except confirmation, he said, “You should write about confirmation,” and I thought, “I’m the wrong guy.” In 2002 when Gabe Huck said that Liturgy Training Publications needed someone to write about the revised General Instruction of the Roman Missal, I said, “I don’t want to get involved with rubrics. I’ll just obsess over them. I’m the wrong guy.” And in 2008 after I spoke about the Roman Missal at the colloquium of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians in Washington DC, participants said to me, “You need to go to a different diocese every week and talk about this.” I thought to myself, “In the bible, the front lines of battle are reserved for people like Bathsheba’s loyal husband. Why do I feel like Uriah the Hittite?” “No,” I said aloud, “I’m the wrong guy.”

When I did speak about the forthcoming publication of the Roman Missal, especially to groups of priests, I felt as if people had hired me to be the lion tamer. It was my job to go into the cage armed with a kitchen chair and a flaccid whip, and hope and pray that the lions never figured out there were more of them than there was of me. Some of the lions did get feisty, but most were surprisingly gracious. By 2010 when the Vatican ended its Year of the Priest, I was having my own private year of the priest. I had the privilege of meeting wonderful men of faith all over the world who had devoted their lives to serving the Church. Even the guys who never showed up for anything registered for talks on the Roman Missal - partly because they were worried or angry, but all because they cared deeply about the eucharist and the people with whom they shared it.

Reactions to the missal were varied. Some people strongly opposed it; others welcomed it; some were just curious; others didn’t really care much. Two different leadership roles emerged - the prophet and the catechist. As in St. Paul’s epistle, they were both manifestations of the Spirit at work in the Church of Rome (12:6-7). The prophets were saying the translation was a mistake, that it was poorly done, and people should resist it. Prophets are not mere agents of resistance, nor are they defenders of the *status quo*. Our prophets cared about the future of the liturgy and the Church that it formed.

On the other hand catechists tried to explain the more benign fruits of the missal’s third edition. Catechists are not lapdogs, propagandists, or mercenaries. They saw what was coming and what the Church needed to be prepared. Prophets and catechists have different gifts; I discerned that mine were as a catechist. Several publishers wanted something in anticipation of the missal; I strove to give them each a product they could use. I had to figure out what books you needed, which companies would publish them, and how to write them early enough that they could all come out before the missal. When I submitted each manuscript (*At the Supper of the Lamb, A Pastoral Companion to the Roman Missal*, and *Glory in the Cross*), I felt like a quarterback hurling the book toward all of you and the people you serve. In the publishing world, the hang time of a forward pass can take up to a year, so I had to throw the football into thin air in a particular direction, aware that many of you didn’t even know that the game had

already begun. You had to move into the right place to catch the ball. Then you had to run with it without getting tackled; you had to help the English-speaking Church in its time of greatest need, and this you did.

During the development of the missal and its period of catechetical formation, I felt that many different parts of my life were coming together. Since my childhood I've had an interest in liturgy and music, languages and teaching, academic study and pastoral care, spirituality and scripture, history and modernity, travel and staying put, comedy and drama. When I was ordained a priest in 1979, I felt that I had found my vocation. I sensed a calling again in 1989 when I became a pastor for the first time. It felt as though I had been ordained all over again. By 2011, after giving hundreds of lectures on the missal, I realized I had received another vocation, some gifts and opportunities that God expected me to use at this time. "I'm the wrong guy," is what I preferred to say. But sometimes other people know what you should do more than you do.

I feel the same way about this award: "Thank you, but I'm the wrong guy." It's the unsung priest in the parish who swallowed hard and opened the missal that first Sunday of Advent; it's the composer who wrote new settings for the mass; it's the prophet who made everyone appreciate the value of what we were doing; it's the people in my parish who expected daily mass, but got a communion service many mornings because I was in some other city explaining why the eucharist is so important - they all deserve this award.

At some time or other in your lives, you're going to hear somebody ask you to do something that surprises you. Sometimes other people know you better than you do. Always, God knows you better than you do. When you open your heart in faith and listen to God's call, you may find yourself doing what you never wanted to do, but what people needed. Jesus says, "The gift you have received, give as a gift" (Matthew 10:8). You may not know what all your gifts are. But when you figure them out, you'll also realize you got them for a reason. You got those gifts because you are the right person. Give them back for the glory of God.

On receiving the Frederick R. McManus Award from the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, October 11, 2013, in Erie, Pennsylvania.