

## Round Table

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The priest who presides at the eucharist needs to be a person of deep prayer, whose offering of the Church's prayers sounds as though it is his own personal prayer. He should know the background of the prayers he says, where they come from, why they are structured as they are, and why they are put into use on specific days of the Church year. This will enhance his ability to pray, just as a background in the scriptures enables him to proclaim them with understanding and conviction. Just as he himself needs to be at prayer during the liturgy, so he also needs to lead people in prayer. For this reason he needs to know good principles of public speaking, enunciating the words and adding melody to his voice in a way that does not sound affected, but sincere. When addressing the people in his own words, he should choose words that are succinct and focused. His homily should form a seamless piece with the rest of the liturgy, so that the people experience in him a person in touch with God, with himself, and with their own lives. To do this effectively during the liturgy, he should practice these skills outside the liturgy. Part of his responsibility for presiding at a parish eucharist is to know the people with whom he worships. He should learn their names, their joys and their sorrows, so that he can more honestly invite them into prayer with himself at the altar of God. To help him do all this, he needs the tools of the spiritual life, the framework of the liturgical year and its daily celebrations, and the skills of public speech.

Those who participate in the liturgy need liturgical formation as well, especially those who perform some ministerial function. For example, readers need good formation in the composition of the bible and its books, as well as the application of biblical texts to the beliefs we hold as they unfold throughout the liturgical year. The same is true of cantors, but especially of the psalmist. Very often the reason we sing a particular responsorial psalm on a given Sunday is not easy to see. The significant words may be buried midway through the verses sung by the cantor. If the cantor does not appreciate that the psalm for the Third Sunday of Easter has been quoted in the first reading, the people will not likely make the connection either. People who participate in the congregation also need help to bring the texts of the liturgy into their homes – how might they use the readings or phrases from the presidential prayers at meals or at bedtime, alone or with the family? If the people can join the rhythm of the liturgy at home, they will more consciously participate at church. Most importantly, everyone should learn how to pray, and not just to rely on the words to carry them through. Prayer is accomplished not through the repetition of words, but in the centering of the spirit in the presence of God. When people come to church ready to do that, the celebration of the liturgy becomes especially full. It is most evident in circumstances such as funerals, and even on Ash Wednesday, where people come prepared to pray because of a driving spiritual need.

Lay presiders need many of the gifts that an ordained presider has. They need to have a sincere personal prayer life that is evident from the way they pray in public.

**They also need the basic skills of enunciation and artful movement that makes liturgy sound and look right in the sanctuary. If they are familiar with the liturgical year, its prayers and scriptures, they will also preside with more understanding. Lay presiders sometimes face the additional difficulty that their ministry is not appreciated by some members of the community or by the priest who serves it. In such cases, they have to press on knowing that somehow God has called them to this ministry and is equipping them for the needs of the Church. This often requires a spiritual center that is not directly related to the liturgy, but which the liturgy would clearly support.**