

Author: Paul F. Bosch [paulbosch31@gmail.com]
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POST- COVID WORSHIP

- 1 What will Christian worship look like when we can meet in person again on Sundays in our sanctuaries. I'm writing these paragraphs as a contribution to dialog around that issue. And I am assuming that, in post-COVID times, the numbers of people in our pews will be perhaps greatly diminished.
- 2 So I'll pose my responses in an inquiring mood. You can take what I write or leave it, as always. Here are my personal preferences.
- 3 FIRST. The Sunday Service in post-COVID times should be Holy Communion, Eucharist, the Mass, the Lord's Supper. No matter our numbers. We have laboured too long – to regain and to re-learn a more catholic tradition – to lose it all because our numbers are depleted or our energies too low.
- 4 When I was a kid, my congregation celebrated Holy Communion four times a year. That has changed radically in recent years. Now Holy Communion is SOP – Standard Operating Procedure – every Sunday, in most Lutheran congregations in North America.
- 5 And in most Anglican parishes as well. Anglicans have come out of a period when Morning Prayer was SOP among them. Now, in both churches, Holy Communion, Eucharist, has become the norm.
- 6 That's terrific. We must not lose that transition to a long-lost more catholic practice. No matter our numbers.
- 7 SECOND. It should further be the full Eucharist, with historic communion vestments, the entire Mass ordo, and all the now familiar ceremonies and rituals that congregations have come to know and, one hopes, love.
- 8 THIRD. And every Sunday, High Mass, please. Music is a crucial part of our gatherings. "People sing when they have something to sing about", says Aidan Cavanaugh, our century's premier liturgical expert.
- 9 The full ordo of the Mass should be sung, even in a gathering of half a dozen worshippers. Follow the rubrics, and stand and sit when instructed.

10 The day's Psalm should always be sung, the people joining in an easily-taught and easily-remembered simple refrain or antiphon, while the choir or single cantor sings the verses.

11 Christian worship is a pre-literate experience, says the teacher from my seminary days, now 65 years ago. No one present, except the worship leaders, should be required to read. Anything. The peoples' Psalm refrain can be taught on the spot, with no print piece necessary.

12 Hymns of course are another matter. Hymns can always be lined out between leader and people. But most often you'll need a hymnal in each worshiper's hands. No overhead projections, please. They usually lack the four part musical notations necessary. See paragraph 14 below.

13 No electronic projections. And no Public Address system, please. Christian worship is at its best when its pre-literate and its pre-electronic nature is honoured. Worship leaders must simply take the time and trouble to learn how to speak or read in public. "Never trust anything you have to plug in."

14 The Hymn of the Day should always be sung alternatum. Men on one verse. Women on another. Choir on a third. Parallel organum on Plainsong. A drone on early American hymns. Even worshipers who are professed monotones can participate. Previous Essays in this series extend and explain this opinion.

15 Worship should be fun, for all in attendance. Not only the choir. Worship should be worth getting out of bed for on a Sunday morning.

16 FOURTH and last. In these post-COVID days, probably communion in bread only. I am a fervent believer in the virtues of the common cup. But these are days when prudence must prevail.

17 After all, Christian worshipers for centuries received only the bread, until the Reformation. I certainly affirm the Reformers' insistence on communion in both kinds. But post-COVID prudence suggests for this time, in this place, bread only.

18 Come to think of it, those opinions, ONE to FOUR, make some sense, to me, with or without COVID.

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