

INTRODUCTION

Leo Ikenaga Jun
Archbishop of Osaka Diocese

In 1973, the Holy See published the “Roman Ritual, Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass”, so that the faithful who cannot attend Mass would be able to be united with Christ and His sacrifice being offered in the Mass. In 1988 “The Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest” was published to guarantee a Sunday service under any circumstance.

Sunday is the Lord’s Day, the day for God’s people to give thanks and praises to God and to adore Him. Primarily, the Mass remains the proper way of celebrating Sunday, whose value and grace are inexpressibly great. However, it seems unnatural and inhuman that one priest should go around several parishes to offer the Eucharistic Celebration. It is in such circumstances the Congregation for Divine Worship is thinking about. While the priest celebrates in one parish and in unity of spirit, the faithful of the other parishes hold and take part in the Sunday Celebration to celebrate the Lord’s Day wholeheartedly as God’s people. Based on these guidelines, the Osaka Diocese published in 1997 the guidelines of the “Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest”, asking the faithful to assume responsibility to hold it.

Since then, the faithful who finished the formation course for this purpose and were assigned by the parish priest have been holding the Sunday Celebration. But the more the Sunday Celebration in the Diocese has spread, the more remarkable have become the differences of understanding about it, and various problems have been pointed out.

To adjust and correct such misunderstandings and problems, two papers have been drawn up: “ Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest ” and “ Points to Pay Attention to When Holding the Sunday Celebration ” which I send you herewith. These guidelines present two types as usable and practical examples: 1) The Ritual according to “The Liturgy of the Hours ” and 2) the Ritual according to “the Liturgy of the Word”. From now on, you are reminded to hold the Sunday Celebration according to these examples.

Keeping all mentioned above in mind, I would like to request 3 points as follow:

Firstly, the reason to send these points and examples is to oppress neither your initiative nor creativity. We expect you to understand what the suitable “Sunday Celebrations” is and to be creative in holding the celebration rich in quality. We are looking forward to hearing from you about action taken and ideas newly implemented to deepen the prayerlife of the faithful. Several years later, we are to publish a new edition based on the precious experiences you will have had in each parish.

Secondly, this ritual, “the Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest” is not only for Japanese. Considering the importance of celebrating the Lord’s Day and of praising God together, regardless of nationality, HIRAGANA is printed alongside KANJI for those who can read HIRAGANA when using the Japanese ritual. At the same time, I also wish to inform you that the English, Spanish and Portuguese translations are being prepared.

Thirdly, I ask all of you not to lose sight of the preeminent meaning of the Mass and the significance of the Lord’s Day. I

have heard: “There cannot be another Service which replaces the Mass. The faithful need not officiate the Sunday Celebration because the priests are not able to offer the Mass.” I think such a way of thinking is not appropriate. Even if a priest is absent, there still exists a meaning to praise God on Sundays in common. It is of immeasurable value to attend Communion even in the community gathering where the Holy Communion is giving by the hands of the faithful. We consecrate the unity of the community and praise God in such a gathering.

Being united with each other as brothers and sisters in one body, and to serve and praise God in the community are requested of us not only on Sundays but also in the various daily opportunities of gathering. Let your heart open wide to God in prayer. On the occasion of studying and sharing, or in the activities you are engaged in as groups, pray spontaneously by lifting up your heart to God. The more we practice this kind of prayer habitually, the deeper our prayer and praise will become in the Sunday Celebration. May Osaka Diocese continuously grow to be a more prayerful community. This is my earnest desire and prayer.

Points to Pay Attention to When Holding Sunday Celebrations

Appointment of the Ministers for the Sunday Celebrations

Priests in charge of the parishes (Block), after consulting the Parish Council and the Parish Liturgy Committee, appoint the Celebrants for the Sunday Celebrations. They will be those who have finished the formation course for the Ministers of the Sunday Celebrations.

To help the whole parish community to understand the need for Ministers for the Sunday Celebrations, it is recommended to explain “The Ritual of Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest” in the Sunday Mass. It is also recommended to hold the ceremony for those who are appointed as ministers according to “The Roman Ritual, Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass” (p.110) and “Appendix N.1: “Appointment of the Ministers for Sunday Celebrations”.

The term of the Ministers of the Sunday Celebrations is 3 years. As a rule, they serve in the parishes (Block) to which they are assigned. However, they can also serve in other Blocks when they are requested to in order to celebrate the Sunday Celebration there. In case of reappointment, it is necessary to attend workshops. (Cf. The 46th Council of the Priests).

Minister for the Sunday Celebration and his/her Role

“The lay persons appointed to this office, should regard the office entrusted to them not so much as an honor but as a responsibility and, above all, as a service to their brothers and sisters under the authority of the parish priest. Originally, this office does not belong to them, but is supplementary according to the Church’s needs “in the absence of Priests”. (Cf. “The Roman Ritual, Holy

Communion and Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass” N.31). The following is a summary of “Guidelines for Sunday Celebrations”.

- 1) **Ministers of the Sunday Celebration:** In the absence of a priest, the Ministers serve on their own responsibility a Sunday Celebration: they lead the prayers, celebrate the Liturgy of the Word, and give holy communion. (“Directory for Sunday Celebrations” N.30). But, “they act in the same position as the members of the congregation. They are not to use expressions that are proper to a priest or deacon and they have to omit rites that are too readily associated with the Mass, for example, greetings –especially “The Lord be with you”- and dismissals, since these might give the impression that the lay person is a sacred minister. (“Directory for Sunday Celebrations” N.39)
- 2) **Special Ministers for the Holy Communion :** Taking out the container of the consecrated hosts from the tabernacle, he/she shows one of the Hosts to the congregation. He/she gives it to the faithful saying “The Body of Christ”. The remaining Hosts should be returned to the tabernacle.
Basically, those who are appointed as Ministers for the Holy Communion are those laypersons appointed as Ministers for the Sunday Celebration. Extra Ministers serve according the number of communicants. In special circumstances, other lay persons who are not assigned as Ministers, can be appointed as Extra Ministers for the Holy Communion by the priest in charge of the parishes (Block) for a limited period of time.
- 3) **The services that do not need appointment:** commentator, lecturer, psalmist, organist, intercessor, choir, collector, receptionist, sacristan, etc. For these services, those who are baptized can carry them out without special appointment by the priests of the parishes (Block).

Clothing for the Ministers of the Sunday Celebrations and for the Ministers of the Holy Communion:

The lay leaders should wear vesture that is suitable for their functions or the vesture prescribed by the bishop. (“Directory for Sunday Celebrations” N.40). The Osaka Diocese does not designate special ceremonial clothing. However, wearing a ribbon with a cross as a common sign of the Ministers is encouraged.

Preparation of the Sunday Celebrations

- 1) Whenever holding the Sunday Celebration in the absence of a Priest, the Ministers and the persons concerned should prepare the liturgy with the priest beforehand.
- 2) First of all, they meditate and share the prearranged Gospel passage of the Sunday when Sunday Celebration will be in the absence of a priest. Then, the homily and the intercession should be prepared and the ritual should be confirmed. Each role to be played and the hymns should be also determined.
- 3) The priest should not leave these matters entirely in just one person’s hands.

Chair of the Minister

- 1) Both, Minister of the Sunday Celebration and Minister of the Holy Communion should not use the chair of the Priest used in “the Mass” (“Directory for Sunday Celebrations” N.40).
- 2) In the absence of a Priest or a Deacon, one who ministers the Prayer of the Church, sits in the same line as that of the faithful (“General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours” N. 258).
- 3) The lectern is basically limited to the use only for the Reading, the Psalm and the Gospel Proclamation. It can be

used for the homily and the Prayer of the Faithful that are deeply related to the whole Liturgy of the Word. For other purposes, for example, the commentator, the conductor, the singer should not stand at the lectern (“General Instruction of the Ritual of the Mass” N.272).

- 4) “Since the altar is the table of sacrifice and of the Paschal banquet, its only use in this celebration is for the rite of communion, when the consecrated bread is placed on it before communion is given.” (“Directory for Sunday Celebrations” N.40).

Collection

- 1) As a rule, a collection will be made according to the method of the ordinary time. If the collection is made at the entrance of the church before the Mass, it is done in the same way as before the Sunday Celebration. In case the collection is done after the prayer of the Faithful, it is done the same. Or, it can be done while the Cantic (Benedictus or Magnificat) is being sung after Communion.
- 2) As there is no procession, the place to put the collection baskets should be different than that of the Mass. Ways that remind us of the Mass should be avoided.