

Liturgy and Worship: A High Priest, Yet One of the Baptized



Baby Spencer William Isbell is held aloft after baptism March 26, 2005 at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels; he is flanked by Msgr. Kevin Kostelnik (left), his mother May Yuen Isbell (also baptized that night) and Cardinal Roger Mahony. The cardinal's commitment to liturgy includes celebrating its rituals to the fullest.



Cardinal Mahony lays hands on a member of the Elect during the Third Scrutiny, a Rite celebrated at the Religious Education Congress' closing liturgy April 2, 2006. The RCIA has become integral to the liturgical celebrations — and formation of all the faithful — in the archdiocese over the past 25 years.

By Paul F. FORD

After 25 years of being served by Cardinal Roger Mahony, we in the archdiocese know two things “in our bones”:

—“The bishop is to be looked on as the high priest of his flock” (*Chrism Mass*, n. 1).

—“Priests are brothers among brothers and sisters with all those who have been reborn at the baptismal font” (*Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, n. 9).

With the collaboration of his brothers and sisters, the cardinal made us a better church and built us a beautiful cathedral.

Upon arrival as archbishop, he expanded the Office for Worship to nine able people, ordained, religious and lay. And we were off, even to preparing for the visit of Pope John Paul II and two papal Masses.

In his first letter on Sunday Eucharist, “The Day on Which We Gather: Guidelines for Sunday Eucharist” (March 31, 1988), the cardinal committed the archdiocese to a gradual but complete implementation of the ideals for Sunday Mass, including Communion under both kinds and to inclusive language as far as the rules permitted (see <http://www.archdiocese.la/archbishop/letters/day.html>).

The damage incurred by St. Vibiana Cathedral from the 1994 Northridge earthquake gave the cardinal an opportunity to concretize his vision of church. The years between the earthquake and the opening of the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels saw the cardinal celebrating the liturgies of the church (including the Chrism Mass, ordinations of priests and deacons, and celebrations of Holy Week and Christmas) at parishes throughout

the archdiocese.

At these liturgies (1995-2002), many first felt the sprinkling rite, first saw catechumens elected, first smelled chrism consecrated, first applauded the newly ordained in their own neighborhoods. Who can forget the caress of the cardinal as he anointed the altars of the churches he has consecrated? Who can forget the evident delight the cardinal takes in immersing himself in the baptismal waters as he immerses the baptized?

As one who attended his ordination to the priesthood, I have never seen him a happier priest than when he has plunged himself into the ministry of our cathedral. And he even sings better when his brother bishops and priests join him for the “through him, with him, in him.”

Of all of the cardinal's pastoral letters on liturgy, his 1997 “Gather Faithfully Together: A Guide for Sunday Mass” is the most influential — and the most (needlessly) controversial (see <http://www.archdiocese.la/archbishop/letters/liturgy/index.html>). Among his far-seeing visions is his revival of the Communion procession, confirmed by the new emphasis (italicized) in the third edition of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal:

“N. 86. While the priest is receiving the Sacrament, the Communion chant is begun. Its purpose is to express the communicants' union in spirit by means of the unity of their voices, to show joy of heart, and to highlight more clearly the ‘communitarian’ nature of the procession to receive Communion. The singing is continued for as long as the Sacrament is being administered to the faithful.”

Cardinal Mahony could have written these words! When the history of liturgy in the United States is written, “Gather Faithfully Together” will be remembered as the finest U.S.

statement of the vision of the Sunday liturgy of the first generation following the Second Vatican Council. It is this vision as well as the splendor of our cathedral that attracts overflowing Sunday assemblies.

Long after the equivalent of his cardinalatial galero falls from the cathedral's ceiling, Cardinal Mahony's gift of leadership in building a church for the Church and Citizens of the City of Our Lady of the Angels will be received with gratitude by all who worship or visit there.

Think of the healing his hospitality has given to the bereaved peace officers and fire fighters who bury their own from their own cathedral. Who can calculate the benefits for reunion his welcome to use the altar and ambo and chair has given to the churches

and ecclesial communities who have celebrated there? And his choice to rest between his parents will enshrine not only his filial piety but his sense of how we should all treasure the homes and people who gave us our Catholic faith — women and men faithful to their baptismal, confirmational, marital, single, ministerial and religious vocations.

How far we have come! How far he brought us! Thank you! ♦

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The cardinal has presided at numerous celebrations of new worship spaces, such as St. Maximilian Kolbe in Westlake Village March 19, 2000.