

LITURGICAL EVALUATION TOOL

Advent/Christmas

ADVENT

“Advent has a twofold character: as a season to prepare for Christmas when Christ’s first coming to us is remembered; as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await Christ’s Second Coming at the end of time. Advent is thus a period for devout and joyful expectation.” (GNLY, #39)

Was this twofold character sufficiently expressed in the liturgy, or was one aspect too dominant? Consider specific examples.

Did the liturgies of Advent help bring this twofold character into focus relative to other seasons of the year? Was Advent clearly a distinct season from others (e.g Christmas, Lent, or even Ordinary Time?) How so or how not? Consider art & environment, preaching, music, devotional symbols and exercises, intercessions, variations in ritual.

Did Advent liturgical “variations” and liturgical choices (again: environment, music, preaching, other texts, devotional exercises/symbols, etc.) *reinforce* or *obscure* the reality that in each Eucharist, “the victory and triumph of [Christ’s] death are again made present?” In other words: did the Mass retain its fundamentally paschal character? Did Advent feel connected enough to the Easter Triduum?

CHRISTMAS

“Next to the yearly celebration of the paschal mystery [Lent-Triduum-Easter cycle], the Church holds most sacred the memorial of Christ’s birth and early manifestations. This is the purpose of the Christmas season.” (GNLY, #32)

Did the Christmas season adequately celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation and Christ’s manifestation to the world? While it should be the focal point of the season, was the celebration of the Nativity (Christmas Eve/Day) too dominant? How so or how not?

Did the liturgies of Christmas make clear the inseparable connection between the Incarnation and the Resurrection? Is Christmas clearly connected to, leading to, Easter? Or did the liturgy establish Christmas more as a “standalone” idea? Consider art & environment, preaching, music, devotional symbols or exercises, intercessions, variations in ritual, etc.

ART & ENVIRONMENT

“During the liturgical year the Church unfolds the whole mystery of Christ, from his incarnation and birth through his passion, death, and resurrection to his ascension, the day of Pentecost, and the expectation of his coming in glory. In its celebration of these mysteries, the Church makes these sacred events present to the people of every age. The tradition of decorating or not decorating the church for liturgical seasons and feasts heightens the awareness of the festive, solemn, or penitential nature of these seasons. ..Plans for seasonal decorations should include other areas besides the sanctuary. Decorations are intended to draw people to the true nature of the mystery being celebrated, rather than being ends in themselves.” (BLS, #122-124)

Did Advent and Christmas accomplish this in terms of art & environment? Consider specifics.

Did the altar, ambo, and cross retain their preeminence in the liturgical environment or did secondary and devotional items (cloths, wreaths, crèche scenes, etc.) dominate?

PREACHING

“By means of the homily the mysteries of the faith and the guiding principles of the Christian life are expounded from the sacred text during the course of the liturgical year.” (*CSL*, #52)

“The very meaning and function of the homily is determined by its relation to the liturgical action of which it is a part. It flows from the Scriptures which are read at that liturgical celebration, or, more broadly, from the Scriptures which undergird its prayers and actions, and enables the congregation to participate in the celebration with faith.” (*FYH*, #42)

“The preacher then has a formidable task: to speak from the Scriptures (those inspired documents of our tradition that hand down to us the way the first believers interpreted the world) to a gathered congregation in such a way that those assembled will be able to worship God in spirit and truth, and then go forth to love and serve the Lord.” (*FYH*, #49)

Did this happen? Consider specific themes, words, phrases, concepts, approaches, or styles.

MUSIC

“The Christian faithful who gather together as one to await the Lord’s coming are instructed by the Apostle Paul to sing together psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. (cf. Col 3:16) Great importance should therefore be attached to the use of singing in the celebration of the Mass...” (*GIRM*, #39-40)

“Among the many signs and symbols used by the Church to celebrate its faith, music is of preeminent importance. As sacred song united to words it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy. Yet the function of music is ministerial: it must serve and never dominate. Music should assist the assembled believers to express and share the gift of faith that is within them and to nourish and strengthen their interior commitment of faith. It should heighten the texts so that they speak more fully and more effectively. The quality of joy and enthusiasm which music adds to community worship cannot be gained in any other way. It imparts a sense of unity to the congregation and sets the appropriate tone for a particular celebration.” (*MCW*, #23)

Did music “do its job” in the liturgies of Advent and Christmas? Consider assembly singing, responsorial psalmody, choral/ensemble singing, presidential and diaconal singing/chanting.

Did the liturgical music of Advent clearly establish it as a distinct season from others in the year? Christmas?

Was the liturgical music truly ministerial? Did it help the assembly express and share their faith? Did it heighten the texts?