Active Participants, or Mere Spectators?

In one of my visits to a center that cares for those with cerebral palsy, I brought with me some seminarians. Initially my companions felt pity and sadness. But the succeeding visits manifested a change in reaction, especially after they began to interact with these suffering individuals, feeding, bathing, and changing the clothes of the patients. Considering that the disorder caused involuntary movement of muscles in these patients, the chores that have to be done for their benefit simply could not be done in a breeze. Yet the seminarians’ pity and sadness were replaced by compassion and joy. There was a movement from sympathy to empathy, from a feeling of sadness because of the patients’ plight to the joy of encountering them. These aspirants to the priesthood have not only seen; they have also felt.

As we start the Misa de Gallo today, millions of Catholics will troop to the churches. There may be various reasons for doing so—ranging from the spiritual to the mundane—but all these boil down to the issue of participation. Many of us will follow the traditional activities (as if these could not be done throughout the rest of the year), but without reflecting on the deeper meaning of our vigil for the Lord’s birth.

Our First Reading is an post-exilic poem exhorting not only the Israelite people but even foreigners who believed in the Lord by living righteous lives. There is no more division as we are all one in the Lord. There is joy in the house of the Lord as we worship as a community. Indeed, in our liturgical gatherings, we are truly one as believers. But are we truly active participants in our liturgical celebrations, or are we merely spectators?

We can only surmise the reaction of John when he heard the words pertaining to him. John played an important role in giving witness to the Lord. John was a burning and shining lamp that led to Jesus. Like a spotlight, his focus is not on himself but to someone else. John was an active participant who put all his efforts toward Jesus. According to the Law of Moses, there must be at least two witnesses to give credence to the truth. In the holy Mass we should be countless witnesses of God’s presence in our lives. We can only do that when after our worship we actively participate in the lives of people whom we encounter. Like the seminarians caring for those with cerebral palsy, our encounter with the Lord must be a life-changing experience. Hence, we must look forward to every Eucharistic celebration as a meaningful encounter with the Lord that changes our disposition from passive observers, to active participants, from the burden of waking up in the morning to the joy of worshipping as one community, from not only looking but to seeing and feeling.

Fr. Ian Paul Empig, SSP
THE INTRODUCTORY RITES

Entrance Antiphon
(Cf. Jer 31:10; Is 35:4)
(Recited when there is no opening song)

Hear the word of the Lord, o nations; declare it to the distant lands: Behold, our Savior will come; you need no longer fear.

Greeting
(The sign of the cross is made here)

P — The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
All — And with your spirit.

Introduction
(The priest may address the assembly with these or other similar words)

P — Misa de Gallo or Misa de Aguinaldo or Simbang Gabi is our immediate spiritual preparation for the birth of our Savior, God’s greatest gift to humankind. Let us prepare for Jesus’ coming by heeding Advent’s call for repentance, reflecting on God’s word, and living the Christmas spirit of joy and generosity. At these Masses in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, let us pray more intensely for the Filipino family and for peace in our country.

Penitential Act

P — Brethren (brothers and sisters), let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries. (Pause)

P — You were sent to heal the contrite of heart: Lord, have mercy.
All — Lord, have mercy.

P — You came to call sinners: Christ, have mercy.
All — Christ, have mercy.

P — You are seated at the right hand of the Father to intercede for us: Lord, have mercy.
All — Lord, have mercy.

P — May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.
All — Amen.

Gloria

All — Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will. We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory, O Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father. Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer; you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Collect

P — Let us pray. (Pause)

Let your tireless grace accompany us, Lord God, let it go before us and follow after, that in union with the Blessed Virgin Mary we who long for the coming of your Son may be sustained by your love in this life and in the life to come.

Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever.
All — Amen.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

First Reading [Is 56:1-3a, 6-8] (SIT)

When the people of God practice justice and do what is right, they become a “house of prayer” for the Lord, a sanctified community whose worship is most acceptable to God.

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

THUS SAYS the LORD: Observe what is right, do what is just; for my salvation is about to come, my justice, about to be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this, the son of man who holds to it; who keeps the sabbath free from profanation, and his hand from any evildoing. Let not the foreigner say, when he would join himself to the Lord, “The Lord will surely exclude me from his people.”

The foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, ministering to him, loving the name of the Lord, and becoming his servants—all who keep the sabbath free from profanation and hold to my covenant: them I will bring to my holy mountain and make joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the dispersed of Israel: others will I gather to him besides those already gathered.

— The word of the Lord.
All — Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm (Ps 67)

R — O God, let all the nations praise you!


C

7

F

F

Gm

F

O God, let all the nations praise you.

1. May God have pity on us and bless us; may he let his face shine upon us. So may your way be known upon earth, among all nations, your salvation. (R)

2. May the nations be glad and exult because you rule the peoples in equity; the nations on the earth you guide. (R)

3. The earth has yielded its fruits; God, our God, has blessed us. May God bless us, and may all the ends of the earth fear him! (R)

Alleluia (Stand)

All — Alleluia, alleluia. Come, Lord, bring us your peace that
we may rejoice before you with a perfect heart. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel (Jn 5:33-36)

P — A reading from the holy Gospel according to John
All — Glory to you, O Lord.

JESUS said to the Jews: “You sent emissaries to John, and he testified to the truth. I do not accept testimony from a human being, but I say this so that you may be saved. John was a burning and shining lamp, and for a while you were content to rejoice in his light. But I have testimony greater than John’s. The works that the Father gave me to accomplish, these works that I perform testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me.”

— The Gospel of the Lord.
All — Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily (Sit)

Prayer of the Faithful
(Stand)

P — Let us pray to the heavenly Father that, reflecting the light of the Lord Jesus, we may also become like lighted lamps for men and women, as John the Baptist was. With confidence, we pray:

R — Lord, hear our prayer.

C — That as a Church we may celebrate the Misa de Gallo with praise and thanksgiving to God for the gift of faith and our love and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. We pray: (R)

C — That government and Church leaders work together in helping our country rise above the evils of corruption, division, and violence. We pray: (R)

C — That families, communities, and the whole nation work for goodwill and reconciliation as we all prepare for the Lord’s coming with peaceful and joyful hearts. We pray: (R)

C — That every Misa de Gallo in which we participate fill us with joy and peace, and that we may share them with every person—the desperate, the lonely, and the unforgiven—that all people may experience the joy of Christmas. We pray: (R)

C — That the faithful departed may find pardon and peace and be numbered among the saints in heaven. We pray: (R)

C — Let us pray for the urgent concerns of our community and our personal intentions (pause), we pray: (R)

P — Lord, fill our hearts with your love. As we prepare for the coming of your Son as man, lift our minds in watchful hope and in fervent prayer. We ask this through Christ our Lord.
All — Amen.

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Presentation of the Gifts
(Stand)

P — Pray, brethren...
All — May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church.

Prayer over the Offerings
P — God, our strength, in you is our hope of salvation. As we present these gifts, renew your joy within us and make us a living sacrifice of praise. We ask this in the name of Jesus our Lord.
All — Amen.

Preface (Advent II)

P — The Lord be with you.
All — And with your spirit.
P — Lift up your hearts.
All — We lift them up to the Lord.
P — Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
All — It is right and just.

P — It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord.

For all the oracles of the prophets foretold him, the Virgin Mother longed for him with love beyond all telling, John the Baptist sang of his coming and proclaimed his presence when he came.

It is by his gift that already we rejoice at the mystery of his Nativity, so that he may find us watchful in prayer and exultant in his praise.

And so, with Angels and Archangels, with Thrones and Dominions, and with all the hosts and Powers of heaven, we sing the hymn of your glory, as without end we acclaim:

All — Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. (Kneel)

Acclamation (Stand)

All — When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again.

THE COMMUNION RITE

The Lord’s Prayer
All — Our Father...
P — Deliver us, Lord...
All — For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever.

Invitation to Peace

Invitation to Communion
(Kneel)

P — Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.
All — Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

Communion Antiphon (Ps 106:4-5; Is 38:3)

Come O Lord, visit us in peace that we may rejoice before you with a blameless heart.

Prayer after Communion (Stand)

P — Let us pray. (Pause)

O God, we have received in word and sacrament the One whose coming John the Baptist so urgently announced. By the presence of Christ among us, reform our lives and give us courage to announce in the world that your kingdom is near.

We ask this in the name of Jesus our Lord.
All — Amen.

THE CONCLUDING RITES

P — The Lord be with you.
All — And with your spirit.

Prayer over the People

P — Bow down for the blessing. (Pause)

Be gracious to your people, O Lord, and do not withhold consolation on earth from those you call to strive for heaven.

Through Christ our Lord.
All — Amen.

P — And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son, (†) and the Holy Spirit, come down on you and remain with you for ever.
All — Amen.

Dismissal

P — Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.
All — Thanks be to God.

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Live Jesus Give Jesus

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