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# Worship as Symbolizing Activity

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THE PRESENCE  
OF CHRIST  
IN THE  
GATHERED  
ASSEMBLY

JUDITH M. KUBICKI



continuum

NEW YORK • LONDON

Chapter Three

WORSHIP AS  
SYMBOLIZING ACTIVITY



A group of people gather in the church courtyard in the waning light of a brisk April evening. As darkness descends, a kindling fire is lit and blessed. With dramatic gesture, a large candle is raised high in the center of the gathering as the presider proclaims: "Christ yesterday and today, the beginning and the end, Alpha and Omega, all time belongs to him. . . ." After the blessings and prayers are concluded, the solemn procession begins to move slowly into the church. The fire is passed throughout the assembly until everyone's candle is lit. As the Easter candle crosses the threshold of the darkened church, the deacon's song resounds in the empty church: "Christ our Light!" The gathered assembly sings out: "Thanks be to God!" Thus begins the holiest night of the church year, a night rich in symbol, ceremony, and story-telling. It is the Passover of the Lord.

In the last chapter, we observed that one of the developments that led to the medieval eucharistic controversies was the gradual loss of symbolic consciousness. In the patristic period, a strong sense of the symbolic had been alive and well in the Church and in the culture in general. Symbols were understood to participate in and to make present the reality they symbolized. Gradually, however, an unfortunate dichotomy was set up between symbol and reality that impoverished medieval appreciation of the power of symbols to mediate reality. The result was that something was considered either real or symbolic. Such a development had particularly negative implications for liturgical and sacramental practice since, as ritual activity, worship is built of a complexus of symbols that interact in

order to communicate meaning. How symbols do that is the subject of this chapter. The insights of the semioticians Charles Peirce and Michael Polanyi and the theologians Louis-Marie Chauvet and Karl Rahner will be explored so that *an interpretive framework can be proposed* for exploring the generation of meaning that occurs when the Church gathers to celebrate the Eucharist.<sup>1</sup>

*Insights of Semiotics*

When Christians gather around the eucharistic table, they engage in ritual behavior that involves interaction with a variety of symbols within a particular cultural context. One of the results of this engagement is building a sense of identity and a network of relationships, not only within and between individuals, but also between persons and God. In other words, the symbolic activity of celebrating the Eucharist helps to build the Church.<sup>2</sup> Semiotics can provide helpful frameworks for understanding how this occurs.

The discipline of semiotics has its roots in ancient Greece. However, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) and Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) are usually considered the founders of contemporary semiotics. Charles Morris, who built on the foundations laid by Peirce, has defined "semiosis" as the process by which something functions as a sign.<sup>3</sup> John Locke adapted the related term "semiotic" from the Greek Stoics.<sup>4</sup> In contemporary usage, the terms "semiosis," "semiotics," and "semiology" have been employed to describe both the signifying process and the study of the process. Those who follow in the footsteps of Charles Peirce usually use the term "semiotic" to describe their elaboration of his conceptual framework, while those who follow after Ferdinand de Saussure usually prefer the term *semiologie*. Today, however, the term "semiotics" has generally been used to describe the discipline that concerns itself with both verbal and non-verbal signs.<sup>5</sup>

Peirce identifies three dimensions to the semiotic approach to analyzing signs: the semantic, the pragmatic, and the syntactic. Wilson Coker, who synthesized the work of Charles Peirce and Charles Morris, provides helpful definitions of these terms. According to Coker, the dimension of *semantics* concerns the relation of signs to their

contexts and to what they signify. The kinds of signs, their ordering, and their relations to one another are dimensions of *syntactics*. And finally, Coker explains, the dimension of *pragmatics* treats the relations of signs to their users or interpreters.<sup>6</sup>

Because the building blocks of ritual are symbols and symbolizing activity, semiotics is an appropriate place to begin studying the meaning of liturgical symbols. In this chapter, semiotics will assist in interpreting the architecture, gestures, postures, and music-making that contribute to the generation of theological meaning in the gathering rite and the Eucharistic prayer. The semiologist Gino Stefani argues for the appropriateness of applying semiotics to an analysis of the liturgy since the liturgy is a complexus of symbols performed according to the laws of Christian worship and those that regulate the action and expression of human groups. He explains:

The liturgy is an ensemble of signs, that is to say, of actions in which the dominant value is situated in the order of signification. . . . That is why it is correct to consider liturgical science as a branch of semiology, the general science of signs. . . . It is thus normal for semiological reflection to devolve upon the liturgy insofar as it is human communication, just as it is normal to appeal to theology to clarify the purpose and content of the liturgy insofar as it is a sacred action and to psycho-sociology to analyze the celebration insofar as it is a human action *tout court*.<sup>7</sup>

The approach of semiotics is particularly useful in the analysis of liturgical action because it pays as much attention to the non-verbal as it does to the verbal. Thus it provides the conceptual apparatus for approaching the analysis of such ritual components as gestures, movement in space, the space itself, sacred objects, images, vestments, color, music, and silence.<sup>8</sup>

Although semiotics speaks of both signs and symbols, there are important distinctions that need to be made between them, especially when speaking of liturgical symbols. The semiotician Michael Polanyi provides a useful schema for distinguishing sign and symbol that clarifies how it is that a symbol participates in the reality that it symbolizes. According to Polanyi, there is an important distinction between indicators—his term for signs—and symbols. Indicators, or signs, point in a subsidiary way to that focal integration upon

which they bear. Of themselves, these indicators possess little interest. Rather, the interest lies in the object to which they point. To elucidate his argument, Polanyi uses the example of the name of a building (S) and the building itself (F). The name functions as the subsidiary (S) pointing to the building. But the true object of interest or focal attention (F) is not the name, but the building.<sup>9</sup> In the case of signs, the subsidiary (S), or name of the building, lacks interest. The building itself (F), that is, the focal point, possesses interest. Polanyi explains that the integration resulting from this dynamic movement is self-centered, since it is made *from* the self as center *to* the object of our focal attention.<sup>10</sup> This is how signs function, that is, those indicators that do not participate in the reality to which they point.

On the other hand, Polanyi presents symbols as those phenomena in which the subsidiary clues (S) are of intrinsic interest to us because they enter into meanings in such a way that we are “carried away” by these meanings. That is, in the case of symbols our involvement is such that the relation of “bearing upon” and the location of intrinsic interest are much more complex.<sup>11</sup> In the case of symbols, the locus of interest is reversed. That is, in the case of symbols, the subsidiary clues are of more interest to us than the focal point itself. Polanyi’s example of the American flag clarifies his point. What gives any flag meaning is not the color and shape of its design, but the fact that a people put their whole existence as citizens of their homeland into it. Without the surrender of ourselves into that piece of cloth, the flag would remain only a piece of cloth. It would not be a symbol of our country. It is, rather, our many diffuse and boundless memories of our country and of our life in it that give the flag meaning by being embodied and fused in it. Nevertheless, because of the diversity of memories and experience, a flag will naturally have different meanings for different people. This is what gives symbols their polyvalent character. In the case of the American flag, for example, it can mean one thing to a young child, quite another to a Vietnam veteran, something else to an American citizen of Iraqi ancestry, yet another thing to the widow of a man killed in military action or an illegal Mexican immigrant. Furthermore, over time, the meaning of the flag may broaden and deepen for the same person because of new layers of memories and experience that become embodied and fused in it.

The symbol's complex dynamic does not operate, however, in a straight line from subsidiary clues to perceiver. Rather, our perception of the focal object, in the process of symbolization, "carries us back toward (and so provides us with a perceptual embodiment of) those diffuse memories of our lives (i.e., of ourselves) which bore upon the focal object to begin with."<sup>12</sup> Thus we can say that the symbol "carries us away" since in surrendering ourselves we are drawn into the symbol's meaning. What is significant about Polanyi's schema is that it illustrates the vital importance of the participation of the subject in the coming to meaning of the symbol. By surrendering to the symbol, we accomplish the integration of those diffuse parts of ourselves that are related to the symbol. That is, in surrendering to the symbol, we are carried away by it.<sup>13</sup> This happens with symbols generally, including such familiar Christian symbols as the Easter fire, crucifix, Christmas tree, wedding ring, music-making, and gathering for Eucharist. In each case, our surrender to the symbol is at the same time our being carried away by it.

Polanyi's distinction between signs and symbols highlights two points: (1) signs function on the level of *cognition*, providing us with information; (2) symbols function on the level of *recognition*, providing us, not with information, but with integration. Furthermore, this integration occurs both on the personal and the interpersonal level, that is, both within a subject and between subjects. This schema further highlights how meaning comes to subjects through their past experiences and within the particular cultural and social milieu that involves relationships with other subjects. Thus, Polanyi's analysis of the apprehension of meaning can provide us with an interpretive tool for investigating how the Eucharist as ritual activity, using a particular array of cultural symbols, enables the gathered assembly to recognize the presence of Christ in their midst, indeed to recognize themselves as members of the Body of Christ.

### *Louis-Marie Chauvet's Theology of Symbol*

Michael Polanyi's semiotics is particularly compatible with Louis-Marie Chauvet's theology of symbol. This is the case because Chauvet places the critical thrust of his theology in the direction

of believing subjects themselves and locates his theology of symbol at the heart of mediation by language, by culture, and desire.<sup>14</sup> Chauvet's project is to replace the notion of symbol as instrument with the notion of symbol as mediation. He captures the radical nature of symbolizing in all of human life when he states:

Reality is never present to us except in a mediated way, which is to say, constructed out of the symbolic network of the culture that fashions us. This symbolic order designates the system of connections between the different elements and levels of a culture (economic, social, political, ideological — ethics, philosophy, religion . . .), a system forming a coherent whole that allows the social group and individuals to orient themselves in space, find their place in time, and in general situate themselves in the world in a significant way — in short, to find their identity in a world that makes "sense," even if, as C. Lévi-Strauss says, there always remains an inexpugnable residue of signifiers to which we can never give adequate meanings.<sup>15</sup>

This assertion identifies the foundational principle of Chauvet's sacramental reinterpretation of Christian existence: all reality is mediated. Two points in Chauvet's thinking are particularly helpful for interpreting the presence of Christ in the gathered assembly. The first is that symbols mediate reality by negotiating connections. The second is that these connections allow subjects both as members of a social group and as individuals to make sense of their world and to find their identity by discovering relationships. Furthermore, according to Chauvet, symbolizing is a dynamic that involves the active participation of subjects in mediating connections and in discovering their identity and their place in their social world. Both of these foci — active participation and a consideration of the subject within a social group — make Chauvet's approach appropriate for examining symbolizing — that is sacramental activity — within a liturgical framework.

The notions of identity and relationship are integral to Chauvet's approach to symbolizing activity. In fact, his approach corresponds to the ancient understanding of symbol, derived from the Greek word *symbollein*, which literally means "to throw together." Partners in a contract would each retain one part of the symbol that separately possessed no value. The two halves joined, however, "symbolized" or confirmed the original agreement established by

the symbol. Thus the symbol functioned as an expression of a social pact based on mutual recognition in the rejoining of the two halves. In this way the symbol functioned as a mediator of identity.<sup>16</sup> In the case of the eucharistic assembly, there are "many parts," that is, each individual member of the assembly, who by *gathering* for Eucharist somehow mediate their identity, not only as assembly (and therefore a concrete instance of Church), but also as the presence of Christ in a particular time and place.

The aspect of *gathering* is key here. For just as the individual pieces of the *symballein* do not have the ability to confirm the contract until joined together, so too the individual members of the assembly do not have separately the same power to symbolize the presence of Christ which is theirs when they are gathered together as Church. This is certainly in keeping with the promise of Christ recorded in Matthew 18:20. Such a promise, however, does not guarantee that gathering together in the same space will necessarily constitute a group of individuals as a community that we could call Church or Body of Christ. Much more than coming together is required. Persons sharing the same space on the subway or in line at the supermarket will not normally experience a sense of being in meaningful relationship with the other persons with whom they have been "thrown together." There is no mutual contract or agreement that such a gathering confirms. On the other hand, when Christians gather "in Christ's name," their gathering to celebrate the Eucharist is in fulfillment of a "contract" signed or sealed at baptism, a covenant that identifies them as followers of Christ and as people who are "qualified" to come to the table to celebrate in the Lord's name.

A common element in both Polanyi's semiotics and Chauvet's theology is that both approaches view symbols as mediations of recognition within a community or social world. Furthermore, that recognition evokes participation and allows an individual or a group to orient themselves, that is, to discover their identity and their place in their world. This is especially true in a ritual setting, Chauvet points out, since ritual is able to provide, because of its very nature, those most contingent and culturally determined aspects that are the very epitome of mediation.<sup>17</sup>

Chauvet understands the nature of symbol and sacrament as contingent on the nature of human life as embodied. Accordingly, the body is, for Chauvet, the primordial and arch-symbolic form of mediation and the basis for the identification of the human person as subject.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the body is "the primordial place of every symbolic joining of the 'inside' and the 'outside.'" <sup>19</sup> It is the body that locates the human person in the world and it is the body that serves as the entry point where the entire symbolic order takes root in us as human beings.<sup>20</sup> To support this claim, Chauvet cites D. Dubarle who asserts that the living body is indeed, "the arch-symbol of the whole symbolic order."<sup>21</sup> Such a premise is important to Chauvet's theology of the sacraments since the ritual symbolism which constitutes them has the body for its setting. For the same reason, such a premise is particularly important to an analysis of the gestures and postures of the gathering rite and the Eucharistic prayer. Indeed, the Christian tradition has always held that the most "spiritual" communication of God, even that of the Holy Spirit, takes place through a process of symbolizing that is eminently "sensory and bodily."<sup>22</sup> Thus, Chauvet develops a theology of sacrament by using his theology of symbol and of the body as the foundation. In this respect, his theology of sacrament builds on the work of Karl Rahner who constructed his theology of sacrament on his understanding of the symbolic relationship of the body to the soul. A brief look at Rahner's thinking can further elucidate Chauvet's.

### *Karl Rahner's Theology of Symbol*

To begin his enquiry into the notion of symbol, Rahner looks at the ontology of symbolic reality in general. His first axiom is that "all beings are by their nature symbolic, because they necessarily 'express' themselves in order to attain their own nature."<sup>23</sup> With this as his starting point, Rahner sets out "to look for the highest and most primordial manner in which one reality can represent another. . . ." <sup>24</sup> Rahner calls this supreme and primal representation, in which one reality renders another present, a symbol.<sup>25</sup> Further, Rahner explains that the symbol, strictly speaking, "is the self-realization of a being in another, which is constitutive of its essence."<sup>26</sup> In this way, Rahner's understanding of symbol is not conceived primarily in terms

of a relationship between two different beings that indicate one another by a third. Rather, for Rahner, a being is symbolic because the expression which it retains while constituting itself as the "other" is the way in which it communicates itself to itself.<sup>27</sup>

The human subject is the paradigmatic symbol in Rahner's theology. He comes to this conclusion by following Thomistic doctrine that views the soul as the substantial form of the body. Rahner explains that the soul exists insofar as it embodies itself, that is, expresses itself in the body. However, the body, though distinct from the soul, is not a separate entity. Rather, the body is the phenomenon, that is, the mode of the soul's presence and appearance.<sup>28</sup> Thus the body as symbol is the self-realization of the soul that "renders itself present and makes its 'appearance' in the body which is distinct from it."<sup>29</sup> In other words, "the body is the manifestation of the soul, through which and in which the soul realizes its own essence."<sup>30</sup> According to Rahner, therefore, the body is truly the symbol of the self. Since the body so completely emerges from and expresses the self, it is indeed *the* way in which the human person is present to self and to others. This insight leads Rahner to conclude that it would be impossible to be ourselves or to be present to one another without being embodied.<sup>31</sup>

Chauvet's focus on embodiment is consonant with Rahner's thinking about the human body as symbol. To highlight the centrality of corporality to human "beingness," Chauvet explains that "the human being does not have a body, but is body."<sup>32</sup> He uses the term "I-body" to designate each person's physical body. This "I-body" is, for Chauvet, irreducible to any one else's body and yet similar to each one. Furthermore, Chauvet asserts, this "I-body," can only come into existence as woven, inhabited and spoken by the triple body of culture, tradition, and nature. In other words, the human body is the place where the triple body—social, ancestral, and cosmic—is symbolically joined.<sup>33</sup> Thus Chauvet concludes that the human body is in its essence symbolic since human subjects come to be through the mediation of their bodies.

Thus far it is possible to say that Eucharist as liturgical action is an ensemble of signs or symbols and that it is an action whose dominant value is situated in the order of signification. Because that is the case, recognition rather than cognition is the primary

dynamic involved. That is, according to both Polanyi and Chauvet, the purpose of symbolic activity is not to provide information but integration that results from recognition. Furthermore, if, as Chauvet insists, all reality is mediated, the symbolic network set up by the ritual is the very place where members of the gathered assembly orient themselves in space and time and discover their identity in relationship to Christ and to each other.

The next section of this chapter will examine a representative sampling of symbols in the Eucharist in order to determine how celebrating them might enable the gathered assembly to recognize the presence of Christ in its midst. Special attention will be given to the gathering rite since this first part of the ritual sets the stage for everything that follows. Additionally, the Eucharistic prayer will be considered, not only because the posture of the assembly has been the subject of much debate in recent time, particularly in the United States, but also because it is a crucial moment in the Eucharist for symbolizing the nature and role of the gathered assembly. Each of the various categories of symbols will be considered in the light of both semiotics and Chauvet's and Rahner's theologies of symbol.

### *The Symbolizing Activity of the Gathering Rite*

Once again, our starting point is the belief that when the Christian community gathers for worship, the Risen Christ is present in their midst. This assertion does not require that the gathering space houses the reserved sacrament.<sup>34</sup> Rather, this mode of Christ's presence is directly related to the gathering of the assembly as local Church. What, then, are the symbols that interplay with the assembly as they gather to worship and that enable them to recognize Christ in their midst? In other words, to use the language of Robert Sokolowski,<sup>35</sup> how is the presence of Christ in the assembly *disclosed* to the assembly? Key symbols to consider include, among others: (1) the architectural space; (2) gestures and postures; (3) music-making.

#### *Architectural Space*

The first set of symbols to be considered is the architectural space, including the arrangement of seating, the placement of the altar,

and the placement of the tabernacle (if it is located in the primary worship area). Regarding the architectural space, the *GIRM* (2002)<sup>36</sup> states that "the general ordering of the sacred building must be such that in some way it conveys the image of the gathered assembly . . ." (art. 294). Visual and structural lines of a church building focus attention and give prominence to specific symbols. Peirce's three dimensions of signs/symbols provide a useful analytical framework here. The first issue raised by semantics is context. At least two interpretations may be valid. On one hand, it is possible to consider the architecture itself the context for worship. On the other hand, it is likewise possible to consider the worship event the context that infuses the architectural space with meaning. However, semiotics' second dimension, syntactics, would suggest that it is the *interplay* between the architecture and the act of gathering for worship that generates theological meaning. The assembly, that is, all those who inhabit the space and participate in the worship activity, respond to the space from their own horizons of meaning. Their interpretation of the architectural symbol comprises the third dimension of semiotics, pragmatics. How the assembly, or individuals within it, responds to various styles or arrangements of worship space, e.g., formal/informal or traditional/contemporary, will be determined by such elements as familiarity, comfort, and aesthetic sensibility. In addition, cultural codes provide a common framework for interpreting objects with sacred meaning, e.g., the table as an altar and the cup and plate as chalice and paten.

How does this first set of symbols that comprise the architectural space speak? What kind of seating allows for a balanced interplay between the various modes of Christ's presence? Does seating in the round sufficiently enable the assembly to focus on altar, ambo, presider and assembly at the appropriate times? Does seating in the round enable worshipers to experience a sense of belonging to a group rather than being anonymous attendees? Does seating in straight rows draw worshipers to fix their attention on the altar or tabernacle? If the visual sight of the tabernacle draws worshipers into an immediate awareness of Christ's presence in the reserved sacrament, does this focus distract from an awareness of Christ's presence in the local church community gathered in that space?

In several articles of the document *Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture, and Worship*, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) addresses these issues, but a close reading uncovers some inconsistencies. On the one hand, for example, article 22 reads:

In building a house for the Church that is also the house of God on earth all the expressions of Christ's presence have prominence of place that reflects their proper nature. Among these, the eucharistic species is accorded supreme prominence. From the beginning of the planning and design process, parishes will want to reflect upon the relationship of the altar, the ambo, the tabernacle, the chair of the priest celebrant, and the space for congregation.<sup>37</sup>

One cannot be certain whether the comment "the eucharistic species is accorded supreme prominence" is limited to the reserved sacrament or includes also the species consecrated within the framework of the eucharistic action that takes place at the altar. The document acknowledges the importance of the relationship of all of these symbols in mediating "expressions of Christ's presence." However, although the article mentions first the presence of Christ "in all the baptized who gather in his name," it specifies that the eucharistic species is to be accorded "supreme prominence." Mention of the tabernacle in the sentence which follows suggests that it is the reserved species that is to be given prominence.

In the context of discussing the sacred species for celebrating the Eucharist, the expression "supreme prominence" poses at least two problems. If "prominence of place" should reflect their "proper nature," it seems that the Church as primordial sacrament should be given supreme prominence, at least within the context of the eucharistic action. Chapter 2 of this book discusses the Second Vatican Council's insight that the Church is realized in each local church.<sup>38</sup> Hence, each gathered assembly, as an instance of the Church, is the location of the presence of Christ. The very title of the document *Built of Living Stones*, is an insightful play on the relationship of church as building to church as the *ecclesia* or people of God that it houses. If the primary action that takes place in the church building is the Church's "doing Eucharist," then the phrase "supreme prominence" in the reserved sacrament skews that understanding, at least when speaking of the celebration of the Mass.

On the other hand, elsewhere in the document, *Built of Living Stones* does acknowledge the need to maintain a balance between the assembly's perception of the presence of Christ in the reserved sacrament and in the eucharistic action. Two statements regarding the placement of the tabernacle in relationship to the altar are mentioned twice in the course of the document. The first statement is found in articles 79 and 250: "In these instances, a balance must be sought so that the placement of the tabernacle does not draw the attention of the faithful away from the eucharistic celebration and its components." The second statement is found in articles 70 and 271: "Ordinarily, there should be a sufficient distance to separate the tabernacle and the altar. When a tabernacle is located directly behind the altar, consideration should be given to using distance, lighting, or some other architectural device that separates the tabernacle and reservation area during Mass but that allows the tabernacle to be fully visible to the entire worship area when the eucharistic liturgy is not being celebrated." Both statements acknowledge the tension that can result when the tabernacle is perceived as holding the position of "supreme prominence" within an architectural space in which the primary activity is celebrating the Eucharist. In addition, both statements make clear recommendations that the reserved sacrament not be given "supreme prominence" within the space assigned for celebrating the Eucharist, especially when that ritual action is actually taking place.

The tabernacle certainly is, in the words of Chauvet, "part of the symbolic network of the culture" that has fashioned Catholic identity for centuries. This symbol negotiates strong relationships among the community and between the individual and Christ by means of the cult of eucharistic adoration. Its very power as symbol, however, can potentially detract from the gathered assembly's ability to experience or express an awareness of Christ's presence in their midst as they gather to celebrate the Eucharist. There is general agreement both in church documents and among theologians that all modes of Christ's presence need to be perceived in a balanced relationship to each other.<sup>39</sup> This requires that the focus will shift, depending on the action that is taking place. In the case of gathering for Eucharist, this particular action requires that Christ's presence

in the gathered assembly be given prominence so that the assembly's status as Church and therefore as the one Body of Christ, be brought to the fore. This kind of "attending to" the assembly may be difficult to achieve in the presence of a tabernacle on a strong architectural axis.

The growing number of instances of communities worshipping on Sundays in the absence of a priest further threatens to undermine the gathered assembly's grasp of the distinction between their role in celebrating the Eucharist versus their reception of communion in a liturgy of the Word. If the gathered assembly does not comprehend the radical difference between the eucharistic liturgy and Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest, that failure might well be at least partially attributed to the manner in which the symbols of the liturgy are handled during ordinary celebrations of the Eucharist. This includes the prominence of the tabernacle during the eucharistic action of the assembly and the practice of distributing Holy Communion from the tabernacle during Mass. What is at stake is our understanding of Church, the role of the assembly in the Eucharist, and the relationship of the Church to the Eucharist.

*GIRM* also addresses the location of the tabernacle in a church building. Article 314 states: "In accordance with the structure of each church and legitimate local customs, the Most Blessed Sacrament should be reserved in a tabernacle in a part of the church that is truly noble, prominent, readily visible, beautifully decorated, and suitable for prayer." For the most part, this statement simply reiterates guidelines mentioned in several earlier documents.<sup>40</sup> The description of the placement of the tabernacle in a "prominent" part of the church is qualified to some extent by the following article [315] that states that the tabernacle should "not be on an altar on which Mass is celebrated." This has, of course, been common practice since the reforms of Vatican II, at least in the United States. However, placing the tabernacle in a prominent part of the church, even if it is not on the altar on which Mass is celebrated, can provide the tabernacle with heightened visibility during the celebration of the Eucharist. After stipulating that the tabernacle cannot be placed on the altar on which Mass is celebrated, article 315 offers two alternative locations. The first to be listed is "in the sanctuary, apart

from the altar of celebration, in a form and place more appropriate, not excluding on an old altar no longer used for celebration." The alternative placement is "even in some chapel suitable for the faithful's private adoration and prayer and organically connected to the church and readily visible to the Christian faithful" (art. 315).<sup>41</sup> The order in which the two suggestions are mentioned would seem to suggest a preference for locating the tabernacle in the sanctuary. Certainly such a location could be described as "prominent." Having a chapel of reservation, "organically connected to the church" could also provide appropriate prominence, but without the same effect as the visual prominence of the tabernacle in the sanctuary. Which option is exercised depends on the judgment of the diocesan bishop (art. 315).

The theological implications of choosing one option over the other, however, are too significant to allow aesthetics or convenience to be the primary deciding factors. As *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship* so pointedly asserted, it is difficult, if not impossible, for active and static aspects of the Eucharist to claim the same human attention at the same time.<sup>42</sup> In other words, the symbolic meaning mediated by the Eucharist on the altar during Mass and expressed through the actions of eating and drinking is quite different from the symbolic meaning mediated by the Eucharist in the reserved sacrament with its emphasis on adoration. This difference can make it difficult for the human imagination to respond appropriately to both simultaneously. This very difficulty was clearly evident during the medieval period when the assembly stopped receiving Holy Communion (eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ) and instead worshiped the Eucharistic elements during extended periods of elevation immediately following the institution narrative.

What is often forgotten when a church features the tabernacle prominently is that the altar itself is a primary symbol within the architectural space. In fact, the *Rite of Dedication of a Church and of an Altar* asserts that "the altar is Christ."<sup>43</sup> Article 303 of *GIRM* (both 1973 and 2002) explains this bold statement more fully by stating that the altar signifies "the one Christ and the one Eucharist of the Church." Article 73 of *GIRM* describes the altar as "the center

of the whole Liturgy of the Eucharist. . . ." in a similar way to the description of the ambo in article 309 as the place "toward which the attention of the whole congregation of the faithful naturally turns during the Liturgy of the Word." Both comments highlight the importance of situating the ambo and the altar in such a way that the assembly can "attend to" the action that is taking place alternately at what should be the two main axis of the church building. When the two are situated in such a way that this movement from ambo to altar can occur with ease and grace, the assembly can more likely perceive the complementarity of these two modes of Christ's presence as they are expressed within the eucharistic liturgy.

Finally, following Peirce's schema, the architecture of the church building, as well as the location of altar, ambo, tabernacle, and seating arrangement for the assembly, needs to be critiqued as symbols in terms of three things: (1) Do these various elements of architecture and appointments provide a context that clearly communicates the theological reality of Christ's presence in the gathered assembly? (2) Is this theological meaning communicated clearly by the interplay of the various symbolic elements? and (3) Does the assembly clearly apprehend that Christ is present in their midst when they gather in the space?

### *Gestures and Postures*

Chapter 1 explored the importance of cultivating a sacramental world view that recognizes the body as the location for the experience of the presence of God. Both Chauvet's and Rahner's theology of symbol provide a strong theological rationale for the importance of attending to this aspect of sacramentality. A deep appreciation for embodiment enables an assembly to gesture forth their faith through ritual actions enacted in the liturgical setting. In speaking of the embodied nature of liturgical prayer, John Baldovin asserts that "it is simply naïve to imagine that only interior dispositions count or to think that any religious group can do without communal actions that embody their beliefs in ways that reasoned discourse cannot accomplish."<sup>44</sup>

An array of symbolic gestures accompanies the gathering of the community. These include crossing the threshold of the church

door, assembling in the narthex or gathering space, blessing oneself with holy water, and genuflecting if the reserved sacrament is present or bowing to the altar if it is not. For some, kneeling and bowing one's head in private prayer in preparation for the liturgy may be part of gathering. Others may greet those around them and engage in brief conversation. Still others may be occupied with preparing to serve in a variety of ministries.

How do these gestures and postures speak as symbols? How does the act of entering a sacred space communicate an awareness of Christ's presence in the sacred space? Does entering the sacred space remind worshipers of their own dignity as members of the Body of Christ? Gestures such as blessing oneself with holy water, genuflecting to the reserved sacrament, and kneeling in private prayer are, like the tabernacle, "part of the symbolic network of the culture" that has fashioned Catholic identity for centuries. Do these symbolic gestures enable worshipers to recognize Christ's presence in the reserved sacrament? In the gathered community? In both? What happens when compelling symbolic gestures focus on the reserved sacrament at the very moment when the assembly is gathering to perform a communal action that constitutes them as Church and as the presence of Christ? Is it possible that by "attending to" the tabernacle, the level of recognition of the assembly as a mode of Christ's presence is significantly diminished?

In the section entitled "Movements and Posture," *GIRM* states that the "gestures and postures of the priest, the deacon, and the ministers, as well as those of the people, ought to contribute to making the entire celebration resplendent with beauty and noble simplicity, so that the *true and full meaning* (emphasis added) of the different parts of the celebration is evident and that the participation of all is fostered" (art. 42). The statement is making an important point. Gestures do matter and, in fact, contribute to the perception of theological meaning. This point is reiterated by the American bishops when, in article 23 of *Built of Living Stones* they acknowledge the power of symbolic gestures to affect the community's relationship with God in these words:

Gestures, language, and actions are the *physical, visible, and public* expressions by which human beings understand and manifest their

inner life. Since human beings on this earth are always made of flesh and blood, they not only will and think, but also speak and sing, move and celebrate. These human actions as well as physical objects are also the signs by which Christians express and deepen their relationship to God.

Chauvet's explanation of the radical nature of symbolizing comes into play here again. The gestures and postures that engage the community when they gather for Eucharist orient them in space and situate them in their world (a world of faith and commitment) in a significant way. That is, performing the various gestures is meant to enable them to find their identity as members of the assembly and followers of Christ.

Recall that Chauvet describes the body as "the primordial place of every symbolic joining of the 'inside' and the 'outside.'" <sup>45</sup> Embodied expression (gestures and postures) is therefore clearly at the heart of communal symbolic activity. Furthermore, this activity can rightly be described as exhibitivite. What does that mean? Worship functions in the exhibitivite mode when the process of shaping and the product as shaped is of primary importance. This mode of expression is characteristic of activities that provide an experience of knowing that is neither rational nor scientific. By its very nature as symbolic, worship is such a non-discursive and exhibitivite activity. Activity is exhibitivite when it does not explain what something means, but expresses it or exhibits it. So, for example, a man could (conceivably) read a treatise on love to the woman who is the object of his affection. Or, he could simply kiss the woman. The first behavior—reading the treatise—would be communicating in a discursive, assertive, or propositional manner. The second option—the kiss—is exhibitivite.

So it is by means of gestures and postures that faith is both expressed and shaped in a non-discursive and yet articulate way. What is at issue in the liturgy is how standing, kneeling, processing, bowing, proclaiming, listening, eating, drinking, speaking, and singing—and doing it together—promote an awareness of Christ's presence within the community and an integrated experience of Christ's presence in the various modes that are constitutive of the ritual. The tabernacle that houses the reserved sacrament may be a deeply treasured part of the symbolic network of Catholic faith and

practice. However, neither the tabernacle nor adoration is a constitutive part of the liturgy of the Mass. Rather, their place, traditionally, has been part of devotion to the Eucharist outside of Mass.<sup>46</sup>

In the section subtitled "Gestures and Bows," *GIRM* sets out norms for genuflecting and bowing. Article 274 states that if the tabernacle is present in the sanctuary, the priest, deacon, and other ministers genuflect at the beginning and end, but not during the Mass. All others, that is, the assembly, genuflect, unless they are moving in procession. Kneeling and genuflecting are postures that ordinarily focus the Catholic imagination on the presence of Christ in the reserved Blessed Sacrament. By discouraging genuflections to the tabernacle during the actual celebration of the Eucharist, *GIRM* is at least tacitly acknowledging the difficulties involved in drawing attention to the reserved sacrament when the assembly gathers to do Eucharist. The insights of phenomenology would suggest that it is the action of the assembly, gathered at ambo and altar under the leadership of the presider, and in concert with other ministers, that requires "attending to." This is the dynamic that will enable the unfolding of the presence of Christ in the gathered assembly. As the eucharistic action unfolds, of course, the initial "attending to" the gathered assembly will alternate with "attending to" the leadership of the presider, the proclamation of the word, and the bread and wine on the altar.

The sprinkling rite, an optional ritual element in the introductory rite, also has great potential for highlighting the presence of Christ in the assembly. *GIRM* describes it as an occasional alternative to the penitential rite especially appropriate during Easter time. Article 51 explains that the sprinkling rite is performed to recall baptism. The use of the symbol, water, makes the sprinkling rite a particularly significant gesture since recalling each person's baptism ritualizes the basis for the assembly's coming together for worship as members of the Church. It is by reason of their baptism, after all, that the assembly is commissioned to celebrate the Eucharist and to be the presence of Christ in the world. Therefore, giving the sprinkling rite greater prominence — perhaps even making it the preferred alternative — could contribute significantly to promoting the assembly's perception of itself as the presence of Christ. In addition, this ritual gesture brings to fuller realization the theological

connection between baptism and the gesture of blessing with holy water performed by each person who enters the worship space.

### *Liturgical Music-Making*

The third symbol for analysis in the gathering rite is liturgical music-making, especially the assembly's singing of the gathering hymn. As symbolizing activity, this first action of the assembly — as gathered and gathering — can provide the assembly with a sense of itself as a communal body. Recall that Chauvet's theology asserts that symbols negotiate connections that allow subjects to find their identity by discovering relationships. The assembly's singing of the gathering song can achieve this goal in a unique way because of the manner in which it structures each participant in relation to the entire assembly and to the rite. In addition, music-making possesses an obvious aspect of bodiliness. This aspect makes it especially appropriate to consider music-making's sacramentality, that is, its ability to mediate God's presence.

**Christ's Presence in the Singing Assembly.** Of all the *musical* elements that may be employed in the gathering rite, it is the gathering hymn sung by the assembly that has the greatest potential for mediating the presence of Christ in an assembly that gathers for worship. This is the case because it is the first corporate action of the assembly, once gathered, and the one musical element, if properly executed, that can both embody and exhibit an experience of unity. Recall that article 47 of *GIRM* identifies the opening chant as the first action after the people have gathered. The purpose of this chant or other appropriate hymn is described as fourfold: "to open the celebration, foster the unity of those who have been gathered, introduce their thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical season or festivity, and accompany the procession of the priest and ministers." Of the four purposes, it is the second — fostering the unity of those who have been gathered — that relates most closely to our focus on liturgical symbols as mediators of the presence of Christ. How does singing do this?

*Sacrosanctum Concilium's* enumeration of the manifold presence of Christ in the liturgy describes a singing Church when it asserts that Christ "is present when the church prays and sings . . . (art. 7)." Article 27 of *GIRM* does not explicitly mention singing

when enumerating the modes of Christ's presence. However, articles 39 and 40 do speak of the importance of singing. While one's attention might at first be drawn to the often quoted proverb, "One who sings well prays twice,"<sup>47</sup> it is actually the first sentence of article 39 that is more noteworthy. The article reads: "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)." This statement locates singing within an eschatological context. That is, the assembly is described as those who gather to *await the Lord's coming* and it is as such that they are encouraged to *sing together*. This juxtapositioning of singing and eschatological expectation highlights the power of music making to mediate both a sense of the assembly's identity and their purpose in gathering: to wait for the Lord.

There is a strong tradition in the Church, rooted in the New Testament, of associating singing with the eschatological banquet. The Instruction *Musica Sacram* makes that connection when it praises singing for making "the whole celebration a more striking symbol of the celebration to come in the heavenly Jerusalem."<sup>48</sup> Several passages in the Book of Revelation make a clear association between singing and the fullness of God's presence and the parousia: Rev. 4:8; 4:9-11; 14:1-3; 15:1-4. These passages culminate in the vision of the eschatological banquet: "Write this down: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9) and "Come, gather for the great supper of God . . ." (Rev. 19:17b).

In addition to the eschatological focus, the quotation about singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs is situated within a broader context of other important motifs in Colossians 3. This chapter portrays the community at Colossae as people who have rejected their old life and ways and have become transformed by their new life in Christ. Such phrases as "raised with Christ," "your life is hidden with Christ in God," "when Christ who is your life," and "Christ is all in all!" reiterate the theological reality of a community in the process of becoming Christ. Furthermore, Paul reminds them that it is specifically their experience of becoming one with Christ and one with each other that should inspire them to break out in song: "And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body" (Col. 3:15). The singing of "psalms, hymns,

and spiritual songs" structures<sup>49</sup> the community so that there is an actual bodily experience of unity that can be felt and heard or perceived. Singing thus serves as a vehicle for promoting the unity that is the goal of their new life in Christ. This experience negotiates relationships within the group as each member works to contribute to the singing. It is not that the perfection of singing is the final goal. Rather, as symbolic activity, communal singing enacts, on the level of signification, what is hoped for in the present lives of the Colossians and in future eschatological fulfillment.

Asserting that music assists the assembly in expressing an eschatological posture before God or that music can unify an assembly so that it knows itself as the Body of Christ is asserting music's ministerial role in regard to both the rite and the assembly. It identifies an ideal toward which to strive, even if it does not always describe what actually occurs when the ritual is set in motion. Once again, semiotics can be of assistance here. The semiotic framework for interpreting symbols mapped out earlier in this chapter provides at least one way for exploring how the music-making of the gathering song can indeed mediate the theological meanings identified in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and in the *GIRM*.

Recall that semiotics, which concerns itself with both verbal and non-verbal signs and symbols, looks at their contexts (semantics), their relation to one another (syntactics), and their relation to their users or interpreters (pragmatics).<sup>50</sup> In the case of music-making, attending to the dimension of semantics requires that the worship context be taken into account in examining the power of the gathering song to mediate theological meaning. Context includes the type of ritual, historical setting, cultural milieu, as well as political and economic contexts. Consider the impact of context in the following example. Singing a hymn that includes the Galatians 3:28 text declaring that there is no longer slave or free, male nor female may communicate one meaning to an all black congregation in nineteenth-century America and quite another meaning in a racially diverse twenty-first-century congregation led by a woman presbyter. Singing such a text as a gathering hymn can either serve to unite an assembly or to highlight the divisions and inequalities that still exist within the community and/or with the larger community beyond the ritual experience.

The dimension of syntactics guides the analysis of the way in which the gathering song interacts with other symbols and symbolizing activities within the liturgy. The interplay of such elements as architecture, acoustics, musical styles, language, texts, and color communicates theological meaning as the various symbols interact to either support or contradict each other. This includes the hymn's connection with the scripture readings of the day, as well as the season or feast. It also involves who is actually singing the hymn — assembly, choir, presider, ministers — and whether the hymn is within the knowledge and capabilities of the assembly. So, for example, a modern building with good acoustics will enable the assembly to hear themselves sing in a way that can encourage and support their efforts to perform the song. A competent proclamation of the Scriptures — for example, a reading from Isaiah, can interact with the color purple, the familiar chanting of a traditional Advent hymn such as "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," and diminishing daylight through stained glass windows on a Saturday evening in December. All of these symbols interact to communicate a spirit of anticipation expressed during the celebration of the Advent season.

The pragmatic dimension takes seriously the interpretations of those who participate in the liturgical event. It is not sufficient to assert that the theological meaning of a certain gesture or action (such as singing the gathering song) symbolizes the unity of the assembly. What is more critical is how those who perform or witness that gesture experience its meaning or significance. Sometimes the manner in which a symbol is celebrated actually communicates a meaning that contradicts what is intended. Singing a gathering song whose text speaks of welcome and unity will not achieve these goals if the language and the musical setting exclude — because of unfamiliarity or difficulty or some other reason — rather than include a portion of those assembled.

**The Exhibitive Nature of Communal Song.** Thus far we have explored pertinent theories of symbol and semiotics of music in order to discover philosophical frameworks for understanding how music functions symbolically in liturgy. Our final step is to examine more specifically communal or congregational song<sup>51</sup> as that genre of music most often associated with the gathering rite. The type of music-making that occurs when the assembly sings the

gathering song is a good example of worship functioning in the exhibitiv mode. Like the gestures and postures discussed earlier in this chapter, ritual's meaning is not asserted, but exhibited by means of liturgical singing. It is important to keep in mind that music-making is not propositional but confessional. By singing the gathering hymn, the glory of God, the faith of the assembly, the unity of the assembly, the yearning of the assembly for the presence of Christ are confessed and manifested or *exhibited*.<sup>52</sup> Another example may further elucidate the point. We exhibit the meaning of Easter through fire, water, gesture, color, music, proclamation, story-telling, etc. The purpose of the Easter Vigil is not to tell the story of the Resurrection to people who don't already know it, but to allow those who do believe it to express or manifest or exhibit that belief. So the Paschal Mystery is "danced out, sung out, sat out in silence, or lined out liturgically,"<sup>53</sup> with ideas playing a secondary role. In this way, ritual singing operates in the exhibitiv mode.

Victor Zuckerkandl's study of singing provides further insights into the dynamic that occurs in congregational song. Zuckerkandl examined a variety of different activities and settings in which people sang. He concluded that the common element in all of the situations is that people sing when they abandon themselves wholly to whatever they are doing. This abandonment is an enlargement, an enhancement of the self that results in the breaking down of barriers: it is a transcendence of separation that is transformed into a "togetherness."<sup>54</sup> In other words, it promotes unity — one of the primary goals of the gathering rite.

Thus we can say that participation in ritual singing corresponds to that dynamic described by Polanyi: by drawing us into the activity of music-making, singing carries us out of ourselves. In this way liturgical song as symbol puts us in touch with the power to which it points and opens up to us levels of reality that might otherwise be closed to us. Communal singing enables participation as it engages our imagination and memory so that we (both individually and communally) might apprehend the song's meaning from within our own horizons of experience. This dynamic provides the possibility for transformation. By shifting our center of awareness, symbols can change our values<sup>55</sup> as they offer new opportunities for human subjects to make sense of their world and find their identity within

it.<sup>56</sup> This is especially true of art symbols, such as liturgical song, since in their innermost nature, they reveal both who we are and who we might become within a Christian faith context. Therefore, as we are assimilated or integrated into the world of the liturgical song, we open up to the possibility of intentional self-transcendence: we become different persons if we allow ourselves to be carried away by new faith meanings and orient ourselves in new ways within our faith world.<sup>57</sup>

All this leads to an appreciation of the gathering song's ability to enable an assembly to recognize Christ in their midst because — as communal music-making — it requires the active participation of the whole person. This participation engages the imagination so that the event of gathering may negotiate both identity and relationships: as baptized members of the Church commissioned to do Eucharist, we begin to recognize ourselves as the Body of Christ, the presence of the resurrected Christ in the world. With this recognition, of course, corresponding responsibilities to live out this call to be Christ for each other and for the world necessarily follow.

But if the gathering rite is truly about "gathering," that is, becoming *one* in Christ, then an experience of disunity or isolation could fail to mediate an encounter with the Risen Lord and diminish the Church's ability to witness to his presence in the world. Gathering songs that include, that speak to people's horizons of experience, that engage the imagination and the body, will enable participants to know themselves as members of that local community, members of the Church, members of Christ. Through participation in the singing, the gathered assembly experiences a oneness whereby distinctions of wealth, class, gender, and race are suspended in favor of unity and harmony.<sup>58</sup> In this way, a state of affairs is indeed exhibited in the liturgical singing: a disparate group of persons are gathered up into the one Body of Christ.

### *The Posture of the Eucharistic Prayer*

While the primary focus of this chapter has been on the symbolic activity of the gathering rite, some consideration of the Eucharistic Prayer is appropriate, since it is not only the high point of the

Eucharistic celebration, but also that ritual moment that should express most clearly the gathered assembly's identity as the subject of the liturgy and the one Body of Christ. Therefore, some comments on the symbolic role of posture in the Eucharistic prayer will be made here with additional observations on contemporary implications reserved for chapter 5.

The recent (American) controversy over the appropriate posture of the assembly for the Eucharistic Prayer confirms the insights of church documents cited above that posture is important for mediating theological meaning. While article 21 of *GIRM* (1973) indicates that the normative posture for the Eucharistic prayer is standing, the Appendix for the Dioceses of the United States calls for kneeling instead. This American exemption to the practice of the universal Church is repeated in the recent revision (2002). If one of the contributions of posture is enabling the "true and full meaning" of the Eucharistic prayer to become more evident (art. 43), at least two questions can be raised in evaluating the suitability or appropriateness of the American practice: (1) What is the "true and full meaning" of the Eucharist prayer? And (2) How do the postures of standing or kneeling affect the communication of that meaning?

The Eucharistic Prayer is the heart of the Eucharistic liturgy. As such it deserves the greatest reverence and the fullest "attending to" on the part of the entire assembly. *GIRM* describes this prayer with such phrases as "center and summit" and "high point," as the great prayer of thanksgiving and offering that the priest addresses to God in the name of the Church and of the gathered community (art. 33 and 78). This fact is highlighted in the consistent use of the first person plural form of the pronoun: "We come to you, Father," "we offer," "we thank you," "remember *our* brothers and sisters," "have mercy on us all." The language makes it clear that this is truly the prayer of the assembly spoken on their behalf by the presider. It is also the prayer that makes explicit the purpose of the eucharistic bread and wine when it petitions: "Grant that we, who are nourished by his body and blood, may be filled with his Holy Spirit, and become one body, one spirit in Christ" (Eucharistic Prayer III).<sup>59</sup> How can the gestures and posture of all participants communicate that this is not only the high point of the Eucharist but also the prayer of the entire assembly — that is, the congregation under the leadership of

the presider? The writings of the Church Fathers provide important testimony regarding the practice and thinking of the early Church on this question.

By the time of Tertullian (d. ca. 220), standing for prayer was observed on Sundays and Eastertide since these days were observances of the feast of the resurrection. Thus the association of standing with commemoration of the resurrection quickly acquired a Christian significance.<sup>60</sup> There is evidence that early Christians certainly did kneel for prayer, but there seems to have been a general consensus that kneeling was inappropriate for prayer on Sundays and during the fifty days of Easter. On this point Tertullian writes: "We count fasting or kneeling on the Lord's Day to be unlawful. We rejoice in the same privilege as well from Easter to Pentecost."<sup>61</sup> Augustine's letter to Januarius expresses similar sentiments, making a specific connection between standing and the resurrection: "And fifty days are now celebrated after the resurrection of the Lord not as symbolic of toil, but of rest and joy. On this account we stop our fasting, and we pray standing up, which is a sign of the resurrection."<sup>62</sup> This quote has led liturgical scholars to conclude that, in the Patristic era, standing was the norm for the Eucharistic prayer because it was considered the more solemn or festive posture. Kneeling was assigned to expressions of penitence, supplication, adoration, and other forms of non-festive prayer.<sup>63</sup> However, during the high point of the week and the high points of the liturgical year, standing was the norm, and it was the norm for both the presider and the assembly.

Thus the "true and full meaning" of the Eucharistic prayer includes, among other things, the fact that this prayer of thanksgiving and offering is the high point of the Eucharistic liturgy. Furthermore, it is the prayer of the Church spoken by the presider on behalf of the Church and, most particularly, on behalf of all those present at the liturgy. In the judgment of the early Church, the posture that best expressed the meaning of this prayer was standing, especially during the Easter season and on the Lord's Day.

While the decision of the American bishops has been rigorously debated in several other venues, the issue is raised here in order to consider the symbolic impact of posture in relation to the theological meaning intended and/or communicated. The gestures and postures

that are enacted in the liturgy are powerful symbols that interact with other liturgical symbols to generate that meaning. Semiotics reminds us of the importance of respecting and heeding the interpretations of symbol users. In theological and phenomenological terms this means attending to how posture is interpreted by the assembly. What do the postures of kneeling and standing during the Eucharistic Prayer say to the people who are actually assembled and engaged in the liturgical action? How does the assembly understand its role in the single most important prayer of the Eucharistic liturgy? What postures and gestures can best assist the assembly in "attending to" the Eucharistic prayer in a manner consonant with their dignity as baptized members of the Church and as subjects of the eucharistic action? These questions are not easily answered. In fact, responses to these questions would probably vary widely, not only from one worshiping assembly to another, but even within the same assembly. This lack of consensus regarding what is the appropriate posture for the Eucharistic prayer may point to deeper theological issues regarding the assembly's perception of the complementarity of the various modes of Christ's presence and its role in the prayer. Could it also be that, because of long-standing custom, kneeling at this ritual moment has become part of the "symbolic network of the (Catholic) culture" that has fashioned us? Is that symbolic network shifting as the assembly grows in understanding more fully the meaning of the eucharistic action? Difficult though these questions may be, they can be useful guides for exploring how the posture of the assembly assists in communicating theological meaning and what that meaning is. Chapter 5 will further explore potential strategies for celebrating mindfully the liturgical symbols that mediate both the unity of the assembly and their role as subject of the liturgical action.

### *The Power of Symbols*

The insights of both theologies and philosophies (semiotics) of symbol provide us with the tools to appreciate and understand more fully the power of ritual symbols to mediate theological meaning. And if, as Chauvet asserts, all reality is mediated, then attending to the primary symbols of the gathering rite can be a significant

step toward enhancing the assembly's ability to become engaged as subjects of the liturgical action. Because symbols function on the level of recognition rather than cognition, their ability to negotiate both identity and relationships is especially pertinent to questions regarding the assembly's experience of themselves as gathered and as the presence of Christ. This recognition, however, does not normally occur instantaneously. Rather, through faithful and authentic repetition over time, the symbolizing activity of the liturgy can enable the assembly to build their identity by building their world, a world of faith and commitment to each other and to God.

A consideration of the role of repetition in symbolizing activity brings us to the topic of time. In fact, the cycle of the day, the week, and the year is an integral component of both faith and worship in the Judaic-Christian tradition. The Sabbath and the Exodus event characterize Jewish observance. For Christians, the day, the week, and the year are the framework for celebrating the saving works of God through Jesus Christ in daily prayer, Sunday Eucharist, and the liturgical year. This intersection between the human experience of time and of God's saving work provides the basis for understanding time as sacramental. That topic is the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter Four

# THE SACRAMENTALITY OF TIME



Each morning along the coast of Cape Cod, locals and tourists can be seen at the beaches bracing in the wind, clutching their coffee cups, and waiting in silence. Everyone's attention is fixed on the ocean's horizon in eager expectation of the first glimpse of the rising sun. When it finally appears, a palpable experience of awe and wonder can be read in the faces and bodies of those who — especially in the summer months — have ventured out at a very early hour to witness this daily drama of promise and of hope. Perhaps many of these "dawn seekers" rarely darken the threshold of a church. Yet, in this simple ritual of rising early and heading out to the water, they are drawn into an experience that opens them to an awareness of the sacred or the holy. Perhaps we could call it an experience of the sacramentality of time.

### *Introduction*

How is it possible to understand time as sacramental? On the one hand, if a sacrament is defined as "a visible sign of an invisible reality," is not time too intangible to be described as a "visible sign"? Surely we can say that we experience the passage of time. But in what way can we say that time is *visible*? On the other hand, since time is a part of creation and all creation has the potential to manifest the love, mercy, and goodness of God, it seems reasonable to consider time, at least on some level, sacramental. But when Christian Churches speak of the sacraments, they generally tend to mean either the two or seven special events of grace officially recognized