# The Liturgy and the Transformation of the World by Love

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Looking at this website has moved me to stir from my complacency in present perceptions and commitments, and to review them in the light of the content to which you have alerted me. This content, I have to say, is quite impressive and the fact that it comes from 20 odd parishes makes me feel somewhat ashamed of our inertia on the Bellarine Peninsula.

In particular, I am heartened by the 9 changes you call for in your Joint Statement: https://www.senseofthefaithful.org.au/joint-parish-activities. Naturally, I agree with every one of them. It was, however 7, 8 and 9 which started gnawing away at me. 8 and 9 represent the external focus that must be primary in the life of the church, and 7 referring to the liturgy and its implied relationship to that life. The question they raise (the other changes do also in their own ways) is what is the nature of the Catholic faith that integrates these things? How is our commitment to the poor related to what we believe about God? How is the very temporal phenomenon of climate change related to what we believe about God? And what, if anything, does liturgy have to do with service of the poor and protection of the environment? These questions are crudely put, and there are some obvious ways of answering them. However, it seems to me that the particular ways you choose to answer them makes an immense difference to their cogency. Let me set out my way to try to illustrate what I mean. When I say 'my' I mean 'using the ideas I have stolen from all the great thinkers I have had the good fortune to be exposed to over the years'.

I believe that everything and every moment that happens in the universe, and human history as part of it, is made possible by a single, continuous act of divine love. To come into existence, to be born into human history, is to become involved in a dynamic process of evolution. The divine love powering that process has its destiny 'the new heavens and the new earth', and for humans full participation in the life of love of the Trinity.

The church is supposed to be the sign of this process of dynamic transformation of human history by the power of love. It must announce this process as taking place in the universe, and it must exemplify its human dimension in its own life.

All that the church is and does, therefore, must be for the purpose of proclaiming and advancing this dynamic process of evolution. Conversely, anything that it is or does that runs counter to this purpose betrays its mission, and shows that it either fails to understand that mission or is too weak to sustain its commitment to it. Clericalism, sexism, racism or egotism in its structures and disciplines cannot be defended in the face of this understanding of the nature of creation and the church's role within it. Tradition must ultimately be defined in terms of the understanding that we have reached of this mission at this point in its evolution. Tradition cannot be reduced to a mere history of what we have or have not done in the past.

It is in the liturgy that we express in sign our participation in this dynamic process. In the liturgy of the word, we nourish our understanding of, and inspiration by, that process; and

in the liturgy of the Eucharist we experience most intensely our union with the divine driving force of that process in the sharing of the bread and wine transformed by the power of that word into his body and blood. The Eucharist and the other sacraments, in short, are mere rituals unless they are genuine expressions of our union in every aspect of our lives with this dynamic process of evolution. It is very difficult to maintain an intense consciousness of our involvement in that process, and to sustain our role in it, without a similarly intense nourishment of that consciousness in our liturgy.

The church's commitment to the protection of earth, and to the care of the poor, is not, then, a mere moral one. This is how many of our sons and daughters who have now given up their faith would regard it, and they would say if you can be morally committed without the baggage of dubious theoretical and ritual commitments, what is there to gain by taking on the latter? The answer offered here is that is the recognition, and acceptance of the invitation to participate in this mighty process that the latter offers. Better to be a conscious participant in a relationship with the living God than an unconscious one.

Let me conclude with a word on the sacrament of Penance in all this. The First Rite minimises the possibility of nourishing our consciousness of participating in this dynamic process because this Rite trivialises the notion of sin to our petty failings, and personal guilt risking punishment from a judgmental God. Not to mention that the paedophilia crisis showed that the Rite had so often been corrupted into an instrument of sin rather than a channel of grace. People do still sin but they need an education of the nature of sin proportionate to their levels of education and maturity in this day and age, not the one loaded on them by an authoritarian church that treated them as infants. In the absence of a meaningful education in the nature of sin, people, I believe are tempted to absolve themselves from its reality. They are certainly denied the experience of being restored in sign to the full participation in their communities and in the dynamic process that those communities are involved in. There are perhaps disguised ways in which people express their consciousness of sin and seek renewal, but these are no substitute for the sacramental experience the church is meant to provide.