



# MUSINGS FROM THE EDITOR, TIMOTHY P. O'MALLEY

## DEAR READERS,

Thomas Tallis' *The Lamentations of Jeremiah* is a stunning piece of music, rendering artistically the first two mournful verses of this liturgical poem. The closing line of the polyphonic piece cries out, *Ierusalem, convertere ad Dominum Deum tuum* (Jerusalem, return to the Lord your God). The music incarnates the desire of the poet that Jerusalem ceases sinning and turns toward God, discovering again the beauty of keeping the covenant. As such, Tallis' piece is especially apt for the season of Lent, when the Christian embodies this return through the renewed practice of loving God and neighbor.



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**LEFT**  
**Rembrandt,**  
**The Return of the Prodigal Son,**  
**1668**

Tallis' *Lamentations* serves as the musical keystone of the summer edition of *Church Life*, focusing on "rites of return." Essential to the new evangelization is the invitation to return to the fullness of ecclesial life. And this return is performed anew each day in the liturgical and sacramental rites of the Church.

- The praying of the Divine Office each morning by a monastic community invites the whole Church, whether attending the Office or not, to return to her vocation of divine praise.
- A couple, absent from the Church for years, approaches the minister seeking baptism for their newborn child, expressing a desire for salvation.
- Lapsed Catholics return during the transitional rites of baptism and funerals, while those well-practiced in the Christian life renew their commitment to a life conformed to the Paschal Mystery of Christ.
- The parish's Sunday Eucharist invites each member of the body of Christ to remember once again his or her deepest identity as made in the image and likeness of God, a creature whose calling is self-giving love unto the end.

All liturgical prayer, the whole sacramental life, is an invitation to return to the Lord, our God.

Thus, as the Church explores what constitutes the new evangelization relative to her liturgical rites, the theme of "return" is a pivotal one. Too often, the issue of "return" focuses solely upon inviting those Catholics back to the parish, who have been away for some time, for whatever reason. Such an approach, while a necessary part of evangelization, is partial at best. If a Catholic returns only to discover a parish so smug, so sure of its holiness, a parish that believes it has arrived at the summit of Christian perfection, then the newly returned Catholic will depart as quickly as he or she came back.

Instead, pivotal to the new evangelization will be awakening each Catholic's understanding of how every liturgical rite, every act of Christian worship, is a "rite of return". In his *Spirit of the Liturgy*, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger writes regarding the return or *reditus* of Christian worship:

The exitus, or rather God's free act of creation, is indeed ordered toward the reditus, but that does not now mean the rescinding of created being. . .The creature, existing in its own right, comes home to itself, and this act is an answer in freedom to God's love. It accepts creation from God as his offer of love, and thus ensues a dialogue of love, that wholly new kind of unity that love alone can create. The being of the other is not absorbed or abolished, but rather, in giving itself, it becomes fully itself. . .This reditus is a 'return', but it does not abolish creation; rather, it bestows its full and final perfection (32-33).

As fallen creatures, we have ceased to accept the world as gift. In worship, we return a word of amorous dialogue to the God whose speech is love itself. And "returning" this word of love, we become our truest selves. The process of redemption is learning to speak true words of love in worship. Ratzinger writes:

If 'sacrifice' in its essence is simply returning to love and therefore divinization, worship now has a new aspect: the healing of wounded freedom, atonement, purification, deliverance from estrangement. The essence of worship, of sacrifice—the process of assimilation, of growth in love, and thus the way into freedom—remains unchanged. But now it assumes the aspect of healing, the loving transformation of broken freedom, of painful expiation (33).

No Christian, until he or she enjoys God in eternal life, has fully returned to authentic creaturehood. We are pilgrims on the way toward the fullness of love and participating in the Church's worship is our slow return to the authentic life of freedom made possible by divine love. *Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee* (Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1).

Only when this broader sense of "returning to the Lord" is inculcated in the worship of the parish will we become effective agents of evangelization. Our liturgical prayer will not simply be entertaining but a genuine expression of our desire for union with God. And our whole identity will become a form of humble hospitality, whereby we welcome the recently returned, not out of obligation but out of the depths of Christian charity, a continuation of the worshipful dialogue taken up in the Church's rites. We are happy to welcome back those long absent, not simply to increase our numbers, but because in their presence the body of Christ is built up and the world transformed. The newly returned are fellow saints in the making.

The rest of this edition of *Church Life* explores such rites of return both catechetically and liturgically. Bishop Christopher Coyne, apostolic administrator of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, describes how liturgical prayer is the pivotal moment of evangelization, inviting participants to enter into relationship with Jesus Christ. Through liturgical rites, enacted as the Church prescribes and with attention to the rites' intrinsic beauty, each parish learns that which cannot simply be taught: Jesus Christ is Lord.

Josh and Stacey Noem turn our attention toward the art of marriage preparation, as one such moment of liturgical return. In discussing their own approach to marriage preparation, the Noems outline a persuasive, beautiful invitation to the reality that the sacrament

of marriage signifies: a form of self-sacrificial love that is a participation in the Pasch of Christ. The engaged couple, because of Josh and Stacey's spiritual pedagogy, begins to discover a theological way of perceiving their married lives together. Preparation for the sacrament can foster a whole sacramental way of life, one attractive to those preparing for marriage, no matter their initial commitment to faith.

Deacon David Lopez offers a theology for diaconal formation based in conversion of life. The deacon does not simply assist at Mass or in the visitation of the sick. Rather, he becomes a sign of that conversion toward self-giving love, which the whole Body of Christ is to live. When deacons begin to live kenotically, opening themselves more fully to giving themselves unto death, they become an efficacious sign of Christ himself at work in the parish. Thus, the deacon is both a sign of conversion, at the same time that he is ordained for a lifetime of ever more humble service.

Katie Ball-Boruff and Kristen Hempstead McGann describe the way that Catechesis of the Good Shepherd invites young children and parents alike into a full participation in the sacramental life of the Church. As Ball-Boruff and McGann argue, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, because of its attention to liturgical wonder and the particularity of the Christian narrative, may serve as a balm against the debilitating effects of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism in American parish life. As children are awakened to the grandeur of being in relationship with the Good Shepherd, the whole parish will learn to perceive anew the gift of the Christian life, ceasing to reduce the Christian narrative to morals alone.

Leonard DeLorenzo, who wrote in our last edition on film, contributes this time on the power of the sacrament of Penance for adolescents. DeLorenzo, director of Notre Dame Vision, positions Penance as a rite of return whereby the adolescent comes to

know, perhaps in the first time in his or her life, the freedom offered by a God who loves unto the end, who yearns that we return to give ourselves to God. For adolescents (and for all Christians), the sacrament of Penance is a re-composition of one's narrative, not as estranged but as beloved of God.

John Cavadini treats the role of the preacher as theologian, using Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, as the basis for his argument. Given as the 2007 Martens Lecture for the M.Div. program at Notre Dame, Cavadini builds the case for the pivotal nature of preaching in the proclamation of the Scriptures. Preaching is a form of exegesis in which the love and mercy of God continues to take flesh in the poverty of human words, transforming the Church in the process. Preaching is a sacramental invitation for the Church to return toward the radical love of Christ.

So then, join us in reconsidering what constitutes a "rite of return." Such moments are not isolated to those returning to Mass after years away, but to each Christian who wakes up in the morning, again learning to offer a sacrifice of praise for the life of the world. When the Church acknowledges the pilgrimage she has embarked on, then she will be able to welcome fellow sojourners along the way.

