

LITURGY/SACRAMENTS—TOPIC SESSION

Convener: Katharine E. Harmon, Marian University (IN)
Moderator: James G. Sabak, O.F.M., Providence College
Presenters: Elizabeth Groppe, Xavier University
David Farina Turnbloom, University of Portland

Elizabeth Groppe’s presentation, “Pentecost: The Gift of the Holy Spirit and the Gift of Good Grain,” placed the major liturgical celebration of Pentecost—central to both the Jewish and Christian calendars—in conversation with ecological practice. Through a review of key rabbinic and scriptural sources, Groppe demonstrated the historic social and cultural connections of the feast of Shavuot (Pentecost), as well as the feasts of Sukkot (Tabernacles) and Pesach (Passover) with agricultural feasts. These celebrations not only offered thanksgiving for successful harvests but also demonstrated the People’s faithfulness to the covenant, in which the fruitfulness of the land served as a primary indicator of the People’s fidelity to God. Groppe discussed how Christianity, which adopted Pentecost as a celebration of the gift of the Holy Spirit, might retrieve the central agrarian theme of Pentecost through ritualizing the offering and blessing of food during, for example, the offertory. Groppe argued that the retrieval of agrarian roots during a feast which celebrates the giving of the Holy Spirit would answer Pope Francis’ call to respond to ecological crises through responsible agricultural practices and renewed care for our common home.

David Turnbloom focused his presentation, “Liturgy Serving Ecological *Koinonia*,” through the lens of virtue ethics, arguing that liturgical celebrations and ritual objects should attend to the particular human communities in which liturgical rites are celebrated. Referring to Mark Jordan, who describes how the sacraments teach our bodies to conform to the Divine and to reflect God into the world, Turnbloom described the sacraments as instruments through which God saves the world. Yet, changing the world does not take place in homogenized terms, but rather the liturgy responds to concrete and specific issues facing human communities, including ecological crises that face so many areas of the world. Liturgies should embody care for matter, not only care for spirit; therefore, liturgical rituals which engage the body might attune us to actively model virtue in the world. For example, the role of food and eating of the Eucharist should accentuate the importance of feeding the hungry, and inculcate a respect for food. Therefore, Turnbloom suggested, Eucharistic hosts which more closely resemble everyday food would serve as a more deeply effective symbol, connecting the sacramental feeding on Christ’s body to feeding Christ’s body in the world.

The session enjoyed strong conversation regarding the ritual consciousness of the faithful, that is, how the faithful perceive the rites in which they participate. Discussion focused on the rich possibilities offered by strong symbols and ritualization in the context of worship.

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