

PROCLAMATION OF THE PASSION IN PARTS

The following notes are taken from the *National Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on the Liturgy Newsletter*.
1999 January

Following the Second Vatican Council, popular participation aids were developed in magazine formats to promote the effective participation of all the faithful in the liturgy. These aids were particularly helpful in facilitating participation in the rites of the Sacred Triduum, which due to their unique structure and complexity, required careful guidance.

Part of this laudable pastoral initiative involved the division of the proclamation of the *Passio* in parts. A precedent for this practice was found in the *Passio* which was solemnly sung by three sacred ministers. Unlike the traditional sung Passion, however, the newly developed Passion was divided into four parts, the new part being assigned to the entire assembly of the faithful. To the congregation present was given the collective parts of observers, witnesses to the trial and death of Jesus, and "the crowd" which surrounded him during his Passion.

With the publication of the revised *Lectionary for Mass*, the Secretariat for the Liturgy has received many inquiries concerning the appropriateness of the use of the Passion divided into parts. Certainly, the sung *Passio*, in its official typical edition is often appropriate in the proper pastoral circumstances. Indeed, a translation of the *praenotanda* from the Latin typical edition of the *Passio* is presently in the final stages of preparation.

The Secretariat has, in the course of the publication of the revised *Lectionary for Mass*, provided a standard edition of the Passion in four parts. While the proclamation of the Passion in four parts is permitted the following factors should be carefully considered:

1. While it has a dramatic quality, the Passion is not so much a drama enacted as a narrative proclaimed solemnly and simply, without candles, incense, greeting, or signs of the cross. The 1988 *Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Easter Feasts* from the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments states:

33. The Passion narrative occupies a special place. It should be sung or read in the traditional way, that is by three persons who take the part of Christ, the narrator and the people. The Passion is proclaimed by deacons or priests, or by lay readers; in the latter case, the part of the Christ should be reserved to the priest.

2. The teachings of John Paul II and recent positive developments in the dialogue between Jews and Christians generally have helped to create an awareness of the ways in which the misuse or misinterpretation of the Scriptures may have contributed to the promotion of anti-Judaism. In light of this, particular sensitivity to a potential misunderstanding of the crowd's assigned cry of "Crucify him!" in the Passion story, as an assertion of the collective guilt of the Jews, should be kept in mind by pastors and liturgists planning for the use of a four-part Passion reading.

3. Careful consideration should be given to the effect which this practice may have on the popular participation of the faithful. Does a participant waiting for his or her "part" remain unduly dependent on a printed "script"? Does this allow each individual to meditate effectively on the word proclaimed?