

## GLIMPSE

### Working Away

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There is a polite form for casually greeting people. I say "Hello" and you might say, "How are you?" I would say "Fine" and you would say something in response such as "That's good". As a different kind of person, when students ask me about how I am I usually respond, "I have no idea." Their responses indicate whether or not they are listening anyway. When extending the conversation they mention that it is a very beautiful day, I sneak in a response such as "O, you're welcome." Their response usually is, "What for?" Every now and then I do get a smarty-pants response; after all we are a Jesuit university.

The word "ergonomics" has something to do with measuring units of work. "Ergs" are actual exact units of work. The word comes from the Greek "ergos" meaning work. We have the word "liturgy" and that "erg" means when united with the "lit" (the Greek word "laos" meaning people) means "work of the people". Church liturgies have quite exact forms, rituals, which can become boringly familiar at times, but it is a "work" and we are doing it together, more or less. There are greetings and responses, and forms and some of the work is trying to stay focused and sincere.

It is becoming clear to me that most people are moving through life searching for someone to listen to them with interest, sincerity and response-ability. It is a "work" of persons and it takes a proper form. Relationships are a "work" in progress. The liturgy of relationality needs a leader. She or he is "self-ordained" as leader. This means that he or she accepts the gifts they have for patience, self-possession, openness and freedom. They expect to encounter others in a personal gift-exchange of time and truth. As ordained ministers of encounter, they stop, they look! They are available, not for a talking-tennis match, but for the excitement of self-revelation. Those Ministers center this kind of liturgy upon the other in such a way that when the other ends a sentence or two, the minister keeps actively silent, looking expectantly and assisting the other to keep on speaking. The usual result of this liturgy is that the person is forced to listen to

him or herself and so really profits from the liturgical experience of being verbally and intimately held.

As part of my Jesuit formation I was trained to answer phone calls at a crisis center in Toronto. We were instructed to assist the callers in talking about their problems or situations. Most often, at the end of such conversations, sometimes after more than an hour, the person would thank me, not for listening, but for how I had helped them. They thought I had given out lots of insights and information. The truth was that they had done their own work of speaking and listening. I merely encouraged them by silence and affirmations. Those were liturgical celebrations of a very religious type. There are other liturgies besides conversation of course.

There is the liturgy of physically assisting someone in need. The form begins, "May I help you?" "Can I help you pick up the M and Ms from the one pound bag which split open and are all over the place?" The words begin the work and the fruitfulness of this liturgy may have sweet rewards, one never knows. As it takes an ear for the liturgy of listening, it takes an eye and attentiveness to enter into another's space as a minister of action. There are liturgies of "Reconciliation", of "Healing" of "Fun" and of "Suffering". They all take "work" beginning with the self-work of being self-aware and self-accepting. Every day then becomes a series of liturgical celebrations of God's goodness shared with us and meant to be shared through us. We do it like Jesus did, in the old-fashion way one customer at a time. It is only a glimpse and never boring, but certainly familiar.