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Scirghi, Thomas. *Everything Is Sacred*. Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2012.

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Book Review Pastoral Liturgy Vol 44, 2

Scirghi, Thomas. *Everything Is Sacred*. Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2012.

Fr Tom Scirghi SJ, from Fordham University, recently visited Australia and taught a sacramental theology class in Semester 1, 2013, at the Fremantle campus of the University of Notre Dame. That was a wonderful experience for all concerned; not just for those in his class, but for all those who delighted in his liturgical leadership, his informative and entertaining public lectures, and those of us who were his colleagues for a semester. In his book, *Everything Is Sacred*, you can easily hear his natural voice in the examples, stories and delight in the mystery of the sacraments. His purpose is to tell the story of Christianity through the perspective of Baptism.

In recent decades it has become evident that people's knowledge of the sacraments has diminished to a poor level and this is particularly evident when people seek the sacraments but really do not know what they are doing. Those who are engaged in sacramental preparation and funeral preparation will be very aware of this situation. Our catechetical practices have changed and there is now a serious situation that pastoral workers and clergy face in parish life. Scirghi has produced a very readable book that will be very useful to all those who are concerned with this aspect of parish liturgical activity.

The book title reflects the way in which Scirghi anchors a world view through the sacramental principle of seeing the whole of creation and the whole of life as being part of the presence of God. With that rediscovered principle in mind, we learn something of the Creator through creation. In Chapter 1 Scirghi further explores this sacramental principle by looking at God as the artist of all creation, at the world of symbols and how they communicate God's work, the transformative nature of the sacraments, and then at how we can see the work of God even in the darkness of the world. The anchor point for all of this is Baptism.

Chapter 2, "Baptism forms character", Scirghi looks at the origins of the term "sacrament" and draws it from the early Christian experience. Matthew's gospel ends with the command to baptise but the early community had to find how to put it in to practice, how to initiate new members. Once again, his focus on the experience of the community makes this information very accessible. The explanation of the symbolic nature of the rituals will bring a freshness to the experience and catechesis in parish preparation of sacraments as this background is relevant to all the sacraments.

Chapter 3 begins with reference to Scripture. This is an important way to begin because material provided for catechesis that is only founded in doctrine, can miss this important foundational part of the story. When we examine the Scriptural foundations for the sacrament of Baptism it can challenge some of the accretions that have stuck it. What Jesus experienced from John the Baptist was a Jewish tradition that called people to repent and turn around to living a good life again. For the early Christian community, this became the way to turn to becoming a follower of Jesus of Nazareth. The ritual Jewish washings that we hear about in the Old Testament become the ritual practice of Baptism. Likewise, anointing was not invented by the early Christian community. It too is an ancient ritual practice used by the Jewish people and many other cultures in ancient times. Scirghi's careful explanation of the ancient source of the Baptismal ritual can provide a rich catechetical moment in pastoral

preparation in parish life. This book also deals with infant Baptism. Why do Catholics baptise infants when other Christian traditions insist that it is a choice that only adults can make? Focussing again on the early Christian community Scirghi shows the development of the understanding of sin and the need for Baptism to overcome our sinful nature and be reborn into eternal life. With high infant mortality, the faith of the parents becomes the way through which they first acknowledge a choice for Christ in the life of their child.

This valuable book concludes with five very relevant questions: How should we call God in Baptism? Where is Limbo? Can one undo the indelible? Who may baptize? Should we baptize babies? These questions trouble many in our contemporary world. With atheism making substantial noise and challenging Christian beliefs in initiation, Scirghi provides careful and reasonable answers to support pastoral and scholarly thinkers.

The value of *Everything is Sacred* stretches from those who know a little to those who are studying the Sacrament of Baptism in a serious manner. The information is carefully presented and supported but written in an entirely accessible manner.