



Episode 1: The meaning of “liturgy”

SUMMARY

The word “liturgy” comes to the Church through ancient Greek culture. It carries with it a triple nuance, a three-fold meaning. Often translated as “the work of the people,” it is not simply the people’s work. Catholic liturgy includes the celebration of Holy Mass, of the Divine Office, and the celebration of the Sacraments.

Lit-urgy: laos=people + ergon=work
English cognates: laity, energy.

Nuance One

Liturgy is the work of the people. The people must be engaged in it.

Nuance Two

Liturgy is the work of Christ done on behalf of the people. It is “work” that the people cannot do on their own. Christ prays to his Father. We join in his perfect prayer.

Nuance Three

Liturgy is the work of God in which the people participate.

The best way to worship God is to act as God acts.

We worship the God of mercy and forgiveness. We worship the God who sings the eternal love song.

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

✠ “...the Father accomplishes the ‘mystery of his will’ by giving his beloved Son and his Holy Spirit for the salvation of the world and for the glory of his name.” (Cf. Ephesians 1:9)

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 1066

✠ “It is this mystery of Christ that the Church proclaims and celebrates in her liturgy...”

CCC, n°. 1068

✠ “The word ‘liturgy’ originally meant a ‘public work’ or a ‘service in the name of/on behalf of the people.’ In Christian tradition it means the participation of the People of God in ‘the work of God.’”

CCC, n°. 1069

☩ “In the liturgy it is the *whole Christ* (*Christus Totus*) who acts, Head and Body. As our High Priest he celebrates with his body, which is the Church in heaven and on earth.”

*Compendium of the
Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n°. 233

IN THE TRADITION

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.” (Hebrews 4:14-16)

“The liturgy then is rightly seen as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ.”
(Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,
Sacrosanctum Concilium, n°. 7)

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

A lmighty and merciful God,
by whose gift your faithful offer you
right and praiseworthy service,
grant, we pray,
that we may hasten without stumbling
to receive the things you have promised.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Collect for the 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What does the triple nuance of “liturgy” add to our understanding of participation in the Mass?
2. “Sing the Mass!” was a favorite phrase of Saint Pius X. What do singing the Mass and participation in the work of God have in common?
3. If the liturgy is the work that Christ accomplishes on our behalf, what are some instances in the Mass where this is made explicit?
4. Why is it important to know that Christ is the principal liturgist and the foundational minister of every sacrament?

FOR FURTHER READING

Pamela Jackson, *Abundance of Graces: Reflections on Sacrosanctum Concilium*, (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2004). This volume includes the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, The Encyclical Letter *Mediator Dei* (Pius XII), and the Motu Proprio of Saint Pius X, *Tra le sollecitudini*.

A.G. Martimort, ed., *The Church at Prayer* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992). See especially Volume I: Principles of the Liturgy, “Introductory Chapter: Definitions and Method,” pp. 7-18.



Episode 2: Intelligent Worship

SUMMARY

The Second Vatican Council, in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, called for “active participation” on the part of the Faithful.

It also called for a participation that would be *full* and *conscious*.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy
Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people” (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism. (n°. 14)

Pastors of souls must therefore realize that, when the liturgy is celebrated, something more is required than the mere observation of the laws governing valid and licit celebration; it is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively

engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects. (n°. 11)

Virgil Michel

Without intelligence, there is no such thing as worship.

True worship, or worship of God, is an exercise of the virtue of religion. This virtue consists in an acknowledgement of God as our Creator and Father and of our total dependence on him in every respect.

Worship is thus always a rendering of due homage to God by intelligent beings. There can be no worship without intelligence, without the quality of mind or of consciousness.

The Liturgy of the Church, 3

Human beings must recognize that we are entirely dependent on God for everything. Even our existence is God’s gift.

If our participation in the liturgy is to be genuine and full, it must also be full and intelligent.

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

† “Liturgy is the ‘action’ of the *whole Christ* (*Christus totus*). Those who even now celebrate it without signs are already in the heavenly liturgy, where celebration is wholly communion and feast.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 1136

† “It is the whole *community*, the Body of Christ united with its Head, that celebrates. ‘Liturgical services are not private functions but are celebrations of the Church which is the sacrament of unity, namely, the holy people united and organized under the authority of the bishops. Therefore, liturgical services pertain to the whole Body of the Church. They manifest it, and have effects upon it. But they touch individual members of the Church in different ways, depending on their orders, their role in the liturgical services, and their actual participation in them.’ For this reason, ‘rites which are meant to be celebrated in common, with the faithful present and actively participating, should as far as possible be celebrated in that way rather than by an individual and quasi-privately.’”

CCC, n°. 1140

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Rite of Ordination

Receive the oblation of the holy people,
to be offered to God.

Understand what you do,
imitate what you celebrate,
and conform your life
to the mystery of the Lord’s cross.

Grant us, Lord,
as we honor with joyful devotion
the Nativity of your Son,
that we may come to know
with fullness of faith
the hidden depths of this mystery
and to love them ever more and more.
Through Christ our Lord.

Prayer after Communion, Nativity of the Lord

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How can we use our intellects to participate more fully in the Mass?
2. What prayers of the Mass would you like to understand more deeply?
3. What do our minds tell us about our dependence on God?
4. If every heartbeat is a gift from God, if God holds us in existence even at this moment, what should be our response?

FOR FURTHER READING

Virgil Michel, osb, *The Liturgy of the Church*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1937).

Robert Tuzik, *Reynold Hillenbrand: The Reform of the Catholic Liturgy and the Call to Social Action*, (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2010).



Episode 3: The Role of the Parishioner

SUMMARY

We Christians are here on earth as exiles. Many of us grow up in middle class Christianity. The danger with that is that we have everything we want and as a consequence we don't really long for heaven.

Central to the Christian message is that we spend our lives here on earth *longing* for our true home which is in heaven.

"Parishioner" comes from the Greek *paroikos* which is also the root word for "pariah." It is the perennial reminder that we don't belong here; our home is heaven.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

Christ Jesus, high priest of the new and eternal covenant, taking human nature, introduced into *this earthly exile* that hymn which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven. He joins the entire community of mankind to Himself, associating it with His own singing of this canticle of divine praise. (n°. 83)

In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, a minister of the holies and of the true tabernacle; we sing a hymn to the Lord's glory with all the warriors of the heavenly army; venerating the memory of the saints, we hope for some part and fellowship with them; we eagerly await the Savior, Our Lord Jesus Christ, until He, our life, shall appear and we too will appear with Him in glory. (n°. 8)

It is of the essence of the Church that she be both human and divine, visible and yet invisibly equipped, eager to act and yet intent on contemplation, present in this world and yet not at home in it; and she is all these things in such wise that in her the human is directed and subordinated to the divine, the visible likewise to the invisible, action to contemplation, and this present world to that city yet to come, which we seek. (n°. 2)

IN THE TRADITION

So then you are no longer strangers (*zenoi*) and sojourners (*paroikoi*), but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord; in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:19-22

Lord and Creator of all, and especially of your creature man, you are the God and Father and ruler of your children; you are the Lord of life and death, you are the guardian and benefactor of our souls. You fashion and transform all things in their due season through your creative Word, as you know to be best in your deep wisdom and providence. Receive now those who have gone ahead of us in our journey from this life.

And receive us too at the proper time, when you have guided us in our bodily life as long as may be for our profit. Receive us prepared indeed by fear of you, but not troubled, not shrinking back on that day of death or uprooted by force like those who are lovers of the world and the flesh. Instead, may we set out eagerly for that everlasting and blessed life which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Saint Gregory Nazianzen

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

† “Desire for true happiness frees man from his immoderate attachment to the goods of this world so that he can find his fulfillment in the vision and beatitude of God. ‘The promise [of

seeing God] surpasses all beatitude... In Scripture, to see is to possess... Whoever sees God has obtained all the goods of which he can conceive.’”

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 2548

† “It remains for the holy people to struggle, with grace from on high, to obtain the good things God promises. In order to possess and contemplate God, Christ's faithful mortify their cravings and, with the grace of God, prevail over the seductions of pleasure and power.”

CCC, n°. 2549

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Be pleased to confirm in faith and charity your pilgrim Church on earth, with your servant our Pope and our Bishop, the Order of Bishops, all the clergy, and the entire people you have gained for your own.

Eucharistic Prayer III

F or your mighty deeds, O God of mercy, may your people offer endless thanks, and, by observing the age-old disciplines along their pilgrim journey, may they merit to come and behold you for ever. Through Christ our Lord.

Prayer over the People, Friday after Ash Wednesday

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What prayers of the Mass remind you of the Christian's status as exiles?
2. How can we become more aware in our daily lives of the importance of longing for heaven?
3. Reflect on John 17:9-19. How can we be “present in this world and yet not at home in it”?



Episode 4: The Church Building

SUMMARY

The Catholic Church is a sacramental Church which means deeper realities are expressed in perceptible signs. The church building is not a neutral place; it is not simply a skin for liturgical action. It is a *place* where prayer happens; it is a temple where sacrifice is offered.

The building is a sacramental sign: there is found the Body of Christ. The door signifies the crossing of the threshold and entry into the Garden of Eden. It is return to Paradise.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

... While the liturgy daily builds up those who are within into a holy temple of the Lord, into a dwelling place for God in the Spirit, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ, at the same time it marvelously strengthens their power to preach Christ, and thus shows forth the Church to those who are outside as a sign lifted up among the nations under which the scattered children of God may be gathered together, until there is one sheepfold and one shepherd. (n°. 2)

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church

Often the Church has also been called the building of God. The Lord Himself compared Himself to the stone which the builders rejected, but which was made into the cornerstone. On this foundation the Church is built by the apostles, and from it the Church receives durability and consolidation. This edifice has many names to describe it: the house of God in which dwells His family; the household of God in the Spirit; the dwelling place of God among men; and, especially, the holy temple. This Temple, symbolized in places of worship built out of stone, is praised by the Holy Fathers and, not without reason, is compared in the liturgy to the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. As living stones we here on earth are built into it. John contemplates this holy city coming down from heaven at the renewal of the world as a bride made ready and adorned for her husband. (n°. 6)

Jean Hani

"As conceived in sacred tradition, the temple [ie. church] in itself, and before any liturgical action, is already a *divine revelation*."

The shape of the building, the door, the threshold, the aisle, the pews, the sanctuary, the altar, the chair—these all mean something. The place for worship is not neutral; it is charged with meaning.

IN THE TRADITION

... You are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord; in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:19-22

We must smooth away irregularities if the building is to rise. In the same way we bring you, so to speak, stones of knowledge. You must learn about the living God; you must learn about judgment; you must learn about Christ; you must learn about the resurrection. [...] If you don't join them together into a single whole, remembering what comes first and what second, I will have performed my task of building, but the structure you have will be unsound."

Cyril of Jerusalem, *Protocatechesis*, n°. 11

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

† “In Sacred Scripture we find many images which bring out various complementary aspects of the mystery of the Church. The Old Testament favors those images that are bound to the *people of God*. The New Testament offers images that are linked to Christ as the Head of this people which is his Body. Other images are drawn from pastoral life (sheepfold, flock, sheep), from agriculture (field, olive grove,

vineyard), from construction (dwelling place, stone, temple), and from family life (spouse, mother, family).”

Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 148

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Rite of Dedication

...you have made the whole world
a temple of your glory,
that your name might everywhere be extolled,
yet you allow us to consecrate to you
apt places for the divine mysteries.
And so, we dedicate joyfully to your majesty
this house of prayer, built by human labor.
Here is foreshadowed
the mystery of the true Temple,
Here is prefigured the heavenly Jerusalem.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What architectural features help symbolize your church as the Gateway of Heaven? the Body of Christ? the New Jerusalem?
2. How can the building remind us to care for the temple of our hearts?

FOR FURTHER READING

- Jean Hani, *The Symbolism of the Christian Temple*, (San Rafael, CA: Perennis, 2007).
- Denis McNamara, *Catholic Church Architecture and the Spirit of the Liturgy*, (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2007).
- Duncan Stroik, *The Church Building as a Sacred Place: Beauty, Transcendence and the Eternal*, (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2012).



Episode 5: Processions

SUMMARY

A procession is an assembly on the move. It symbolizes, in every instance, our pilgrimage through this world to our true homeland; we are citizens of heaven.

There is a difference between “gathering” and “assembly.” A gathering can be any group. An assembly, on the other hand, is a group called together, formed into a body, united in their purpose and in their destination.

There are four processions in the Mass: the Entrance, Gospel, Offertory and Communion processions. They symbolize the constant journey deeper and deeper into the mystery of God.

Even when there is no visible procession, there are signs that represent our movement toward God: the church door with its threshold and aisle (especially when its design distinguishes it from the rest of the floor) and the entrance to the sanctuary (marked with a rail, or gate, or steps). These are all sacramental signs of procession.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God; because they are signs they also instruct. [...]

It is therefore of the highest importance that the faithful should easily understand the sacramental signs, and should frequent with great eagerness those sacraments which were instituted to nourish the Christian life. (n°. 59)

Jean Hani

“...Romano Guardini writes that modern man needs to relearn the profound importance of gestures. The sign of the cross made with blessed water is more often than not a purely mechanical gesture. Perhaps an even more mechanical act is to ‘enter the church’. And yet how much we miss, through lack of attention, in the apparently insignificant acts of ‘crossing the threshold’ and ‘going through the door’, for what is involved is the mystery of ‘passage’, when the existence in traditional societies of all manner of ‘rites of passage’, and especially It is of the essence of the Church that she be both human and divine, visible and yet invisibly

equipped, eager to act and yet intent on rites of hospitality." ... "we pass from one world to another."

IN THE TRADITION

The LORD said to Abram: Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father's house to a land that I will show you.

Genesis 12:1

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.

Psalm 100:4

"[The city] which is heavenly and is a pilgrim on the earth does not make false gods, but is herself made by the true God of whom she herself must be the true sacrifice. Yet both [cities] alike either enjoy temporal good things, or are afflicted with temporal evils, but with diverse faith, diverse hope, and diverse love, until they must be separated by the last judgment, and each must receive her own end, of which there is no end."

The City of God, Book XVIII, St. Augustine

"[Christians] live each in his native land but as though they were not really at home there [as sojourners]. They share in all duties as citizens and suffer all hardships as strangers. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every fatherland a foreign land ... They dwell on earth but they are citizens of heaven"

Letter to Diognetus

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

¶ "Besides sacramental liturgy and sacramentals, catechesis must take into account the forms of piety and popular devotions among the faithful. The religious sense of the Christian people has always found expression in various

forms of piety surrounding the Church's sacramental life, such as the veneration of relics, visits to sanctuaries, pilgrimages, processions, the stations of the cross, religious dances, the rosary, medals, etc."

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°.
1674

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Ascension of the Lord, Vigil

May the gifts we have received from your altar, Lord,
kindle in our hearts a longing for the heavenly homeland
and cause us to press forward,
following in the Savior's footsteps,
to the place where for our sake he entered
before us.

Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Processions are perennial signs of our journey to heaven. What other signs are reminders that we are made for heaven?
2. Christians, like ancient Israel, journey not as individuals, but as a people. In the context of Exodus 15-20, what other similarities characterize this pilgrimage?

FOR FURTHER READING

Jean Hani, *The Symbolism of the Christian Temple*, (San Rafael, CA: Perennis, 2007).
Denis McNamara, *How to Read Churches: A Crash Course in Ecclesiastical Architecture*, (New York: Rizzoli, 2011).



Episode 6: Signs and Symbols

SUMMARY

The Catholic Mass is full of signs and symbols. Where do these signs come from? Where do they get their meaning? The Church teaches that the meaning comes from four categories: creation, human culture, the Old Testament and they are fully revealed in the mission of Christ narrated for us in the New Testament. The sacramental system depends on signs that are perceptible. Every created thing has the impression of God, the Divine Artisan.

In the first category, creation itself, we can see what the sacramental signs mean. Water means cleansing; oil means healing, protection. The second category is human culture: what are the naturally human things we do? Language, too, falls into this category. We speak in different ways depending on the social context. The third category includes the events of the Old Testament which provide models for meaning: crossing the Red Sea symbolizes freedom from slavery; the great flood symbolizes the destruction of evil; the preaching of the prophets represents the voice of God, his desire to restore us to life.

The mystery of creation, culture and the old covenant are brought together in the fourth category, in Christ, who is the fullest revelation of God—he *is* God!

Nothing in the Mass is there by chance; everything in the liturgy has meaning.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

... it is from scripture that lessons are read and explained in the homily, and psalms are sung; the prayers, collects, and liturgical songs are scriptural in their inspiration and their force, and it is from the scriptures that actions and signs derive their meaning. (n°. 24)

... the visible signs used by the liturgy to signify invisible divine things have been chosen by Christ or the Church. Thus not only when things are read “which were written for our instruction” (Rom. 15:4), but also when the Church prays or sings or acts, the faith of those taking part is nourished and their minds are raised to God, so that they may offer Him their rational service and more abundantly receive His grace. (n°. 33)

Saint John Paul II

The best way to enter into the mystery of salvation made present in the sacred ‘signs’ remains that of following faithfully the unfolding of the liturgical year.

Pastors should be committed to that ‘mystagogical’ catechesis so dear to the Fathers of the Church, by which the faithful are helped to understand the meaning of the liturgy’s words and actions, to pass from its signs to the mystery which they contain, and to enter into that mystery in every aspect of their lives.

Mane Nobiscum Domine, n°. 17

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

† A sacramental celebration is woven from signs and symbols. In keeping with the divine pedagogy of salvation, their meaning is rooted in the work of creation and in human culture, specified by the events of the Old Covenant and fully revealed in the person and work of Christ.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 1145

† “In his preaching the Lord Jesus often makes use of the signs of creation to make known the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. He performs healings and illustrates his preaching with physical signs or symbolic gestures. He gives new meaning to the deeds and signs of the Old Covenant, above all to the Exodus and the Passover, for he himself is the meaning of all these signs.”

CCC, n°. 1151

IN THE TRADITION

Consider, beloved, how the Lord keeps reminding us of the resurrection that is to come, of which he has made the Lord Jesus Christ the first fruits by raising him from the

dead. Let us look, beloved, at the resurrection that occurs at its appointed time. Day and night show us a resurrection; the night lies in sleep, day rises again; the day departs, night takes its place. Let us think about the harvest; how does the sowing take place, and in what manner? The sower goes out and casts each seed onto the ground. Dry and bare, they fall into the earth and decay. Then the greatness of the Lord’s providence raises them up again from decay, and out of one many are produced and yield fruit.

Letter to the Corinthians, Pope Clement I

It is not at the clothing of the words
that one should gaze
but at the power hidden in the words.

St. Ephrem

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

May your Sacraments, O Lord, we
pray,
perfect in us what lies within them,
that what we now celebrate in signs
we may one day possess in truth.
Through Christ our Lord.

Prayer after Communion, Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what ways are created things used in the Mass?
2. What events or images from the Sacred Scriptures can you recognize in the celebration of the Mass?
3. What are some of the signs in the liturgy that you would like to better understand? How do the words the Church uses manifest the meaning of these signs?



Episode 7: Sacramental Signs

SUMMARY

The Catholic Church teaches that a sacrament is an outward sign, instituted by Christ, to give grace. Or as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts it:

The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. (n°. 1131)

In any case, a sacrament is comprised of two parts: the perceptible sign. It is something we can see, or smell, or touch, or taste, or hear. In the tradition, this is called the “*sacmentum*.” Then there is the invisible reality, called the “*res*” by the tradition. It is ultimately the grace of God.

We should consider these two things in every sacramental experience. Ideally the meaning of the sacramental sign should be evident. For this to happen, though, we must be completely invested in the Christian culture from which the meaning flows.

Baptism provides a great example, because to the Christian mind, water (the sacramental sign) is not simply a chemical formula: H₂O. It takes its meaning, not from science, but from the scriptures: Creation (Gn 1:2), the Great Flood (Gn 7), the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex 12-14), the Jordan (Jos 3-5; Mt 3; Mk 1; Lk 3), the blood and water flowing from the side of Christ (Jn 19: 34). Water for Christians means cleansing, washing, and purifying.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

... the visible signs used by the liturgy to signify invisible divine things have been chosen by Christ or the Church. Thus not only when things are read “which were written for our instruction” (Rom. 15:4), but also when the Church prays or sings or acts, the faith of those taking part is nourished and their minds are raised to God, so that they may offer Him their rational service and more abundantly receive His grace. (n°. 33)

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church

Our union with the Church in heaven is put into effect in its noblest manner especially in the sacred Liturgy, wherein the power of the

Holy Spirit acts upon us through sacramental signs. Then, with combined rejoicing we celebrate together the praise of the divine majesty; then all those from every tribe and tongue and people and nation who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and gathered together into one Church, with one song of praise magnify the one and triune God. Celebrating the Eucharistic sacrifice therefore, we are most closely united to the Church in heaven in communion with and venerating the memory first of all of the glorious ever-Virgin Mary, of Blessed Joseph and the blessed apostles and martyrs and of all the saints. (n°.50)

IN THE TRADITION

There can be no religious society, whether the religion be true or false, without some sacrament or visible symbol to serve as a bond of union. The importance of these sacraments cannot be overstated, and only scoffers will treat them lightly.

Augustine of Hippo, *Contra Faustum*, n°. 19.11

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ “From where do the sacramental signs come? Some come from created things (light, water, fire, bread, wine, oil); others come from social life (washing, anointing, breaking of bread). Still others come from the history of salvation in the Old Covenant (the Passover rites, the sacrifices, the laying on of hands, the consecrations). These signs, some of which are normative and unchangeable, were taken up by Christ and are made the bearers of his saving and sanctifying action.”

Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 237

☩ “Actions and words are very closely linked in the celebration of the sacraments. Indeed, even if the symbolic actions are already in themselves a language, it is necessary that the words of the rite accompany and give life to these actions. The liturgical words and actions are inseparable both insofar as they are meaningful signs and insofar as they bring about what they signify.”

Compendium of the CCC, n°. 238

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Communion Antiphon

That life which was with the Father became visible, and has appeared to us.

1 John 1:2

Prayer after Communion

May your divine Sacrament, O Lord, which we have received, fill the inner depths of our heart and, by its working mightily within us, make us partakers of its grace. Through Christ our Lord.

Saturday, Second Week of Lent

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What sacramental signs are most visible to you at the celebration of Mass?
2. How can you attune yourself to recognizing the sacramental signs?

FOR FURTHER READING

Randy Stice, *Understanding the Sacraments of Healing: A Rite-Based Approach*, (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2015).

Liam Walsh, op, *Sacraments of Initiation: A theology of Life, Word, and Rite*, 2nd edition, (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2011). See especially chapter 1-3.



Episode 8: Purpose of the Mass

SUMMARY

In everything we do in life, it is essential to understand the goal or purpose, if we want to participate in a fruitful manner. In the Catholic Mass, the goal of our worship is quite clearly directed at the praise of God and the sanctification of the world. In fact, the Church puts these very words on the lips of her ministers and faithful at every celebration of the Eucharist:

Priest: Pray, brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the Almighty Father.

People: May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands, for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church.

Some mistakenly believe that the goal of Mass is to develop community. We must be clear, however, that while the tradition teaches that the greatest manifestation of the church is at Mass celebrated by the bishop with his priests, deacons and all the faithful, this community, in

fact, is a by-product of the authentic worship of God and care for neighbor.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

The liturgy in its turn moves the faithful, filled with “the paschal sacraments,” to be “one in holiness”; it prays that “they may hold fast in their lives to what they have grasped by their faith”; the renewal in the Eucharist of the covenant between the Lord and man draws the faithful into the compelling love of Christ and sets them on fire. From the liturgy, therefore, and especially from the Eucharist, as from a font, grace is poured forth upon us; and the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God, to which all other activities of the Church are directed as toward their end, is achieved in the most efficacious possible way. (n°. 10)

... therefore the liturgical life of the parish and its relationship to the bishop must be fostered theoretically and practically among the faithful and clergy; efforts also must be made to encourage a sense of community within the parish, above all in the common celebration of the Sunday Mass. (n°. 42)

The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God; because they are signs they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it; that is why they are called "sacraments of faith." They do indeed impart grace, but, in addition, the very act of celebrating them most effectively disposes the faithful to receive this grace in a fruitful manner, to worship God duly, and to practice charity. (n°. 59)

General Instruction of the Roman Missal

The celebration of Mass, as the action of Christ and the People of God arrayed hierarchically, is the center of the whole Christian life for the Church both universal and local, as well as for each of the faithful individually. In it is found the high point both of the action by which God sanctifies the world in Christ and of the worship that the human race offers to the Father, adoring him through Christ, the Son of God, in the Holy Spirit. In it, moreover, during the course of the year, the mysteries of redemption are recalled so as in some way to be made present. Furthermore, the other sacred actions and all the activities of the Christian life are bound up with it, flow from it, and are ordered to it. (n°. 16)

IN THE TRADITION

"You cannot pray at home as at church, where there is a great multitude, where exclamations are cried out to God as from one great heart, and where there is something more: the union of minds, the accord of souls, the bond of charity, the prayers of the priests."

St. John Chrysostom,
De incomprehensibili, 3

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ "The duty to offer God authentic worship concerns man both as an individual and as a social being."

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 2136

☩ "God entrusted the sabbath to Israel to keep as a sign of the irrevocable covenant. The sabbath is for the Lord, holy and set apart for the praise of God, his work of creation, and his saving actions on behalf of Israel."

CCC, n°. 2171

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Common Preface IV

For, although you have no need of our praise, yet our thanksgiving is itself your gift...

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What can you do to remind yourself that participation at Mass is meant, principally, to praise God and pray for sanctification of the world?
2. How is authentic praise of God the source of care for our neighbor?
3. How can prayer at Mass be connected to our everyday life?

FOR FURTHER READING

Virgil Michel, *Christian Social Reconstruction*, (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing Company, 1937).

Lambert Beauduin, *Liturgy, the Life of the Church*, (Hampshire, UK: Saint Michael's Abbey Press, 2002).



Episode 9: Active Participation

SUMMARY

Pope Saint Pius X introduced the phrase “active participation” to the Catholic world. It first appears in his Motu proprio, *Tra le sollecitudini*, on November 22, 1903. On the feast of Saint Cecilia, patron of music. The holy pope was calling for the restoration of Gregorian chant:

“We deem it necessary to provide before anything else for the sanctity and dignity of the temple, in which the faithful assemble for no other object than that of acquiring this spirit from its foremost and indispensable font, which is the active participation in the most holy mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church.”

Vatican II will use the term in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. Time has shown us that there is a challenge with the English translation. Active does not simply mean “doing things”. The Italian version, “*attiva*”, includes the nuance of attaining full participation. The Latin, “*actuosa*”, adds the nuance of actualizing or realizing authentic participation.

The Church weaves the notion of active participation, together with full and conscious into her understanding. We should be engaged fully, conscious of what we are doing, aware of the liturgy’s beauty and richness. This participation is first and foremost interior. Like Christ, we offer ourselves from our hearts, completely to the Father. Only then can our participation be full.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit. (n°. 14)

Mediator Dei

But the chief element of divine worship must be interior. For we must always live in Christ and give ourselves to Him completely, so that in Him, with Him and through Him the heavenly Father may be duly glorified. The sacred liturgy requires, however, that both of these elements [interior and exterior] be intimately linked with each other. (n°. 24)

IN THE TRADITION

You will keep this practice forever as a statute for yourselves and your descendants. Thus, when you have entered the land which the LORD will give you as he promised, you must observe this rite. When your children ask you, "What does this rite of yours mean?" you will reply, "It is the Passover sacrifice for the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt; when he struck down the Egyptians, he delivered our houses." Then the people knelt and bowed down, and the Israelites went and did exactly as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron.

Exodus 12:24-28

† It should be made clear that the word "participation" does not refer to mere external activity during the celebration. In fact, the active participation called for by the Council must be understood in more substantial terms, on the basis of a greater awareness of the mystery being celebrated and its relationship to daily life. [...] The faithful need to be reminded that there can be no *actuosa participatio* in the sacred mysteries without an accompanying effort to participate actively in the life of the Church as a whole, including a missionary commitment to bring Christ's love into the life of society.

Sacramentum Caritatis, n°. 52, 55

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

† The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life." "The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch."

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 1324

† All gather together. Christians come together in one place for the Eucharistic assembly. At its head is Christ himself, the principal agent of the Eucharist. He is high priest of the New Covenant; it is he himself who presides invisibly over every Eucharistic celebration. [...] All have their own active parts to play in the celebration, each in his own way: readers, those who bring up the offerings, those who give communion, and the whole people whose "Amen" manifests their participation.

CCC, n°. 1348

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Grant, O merciful God, that we may be worthy to serve ever fittingly at your altars, and there to be saved by constant participation. Through Christ our Lord.

Prayer over the Offerings, Friday of the Fifth Week of Lent

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Read I Samuel 15:22. Why does the prophet say that "obedience is better than sacrifice"?
2. How can we become more aware of our internal participation in the Mass?
3. What words or prayers in the Mass find an echo in your heart and remain with you throughout the day?

FOR FURTHER READING

Pamela Jackson, *Abundance of Graces: Reflections on Sacrosanctum Concilium*, (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2004).



Episode 10: Who Says the Mass Is Boring?

SUMMARY

One often hears that Mass is boring. I like to say that if you find it boring, you're looking at the wrong thing. You are probably focused on its structure. Ritual requires structure.

And so there is a sense in which Mass is the same: it's supposed to be repetitive! Repetition is absolutely essential in any ritual; and so it is with the Mass. At Mass we should know what to expect. On the other hand, irregularity in ritual means distraction. Distraction calls attention to itself, and thus away from God.

But let repetition not mean "boring". Rather let us try to see the structure of the Mass as regular and familiar. Let the ritual provide a comfortable place for prayer to happen. Structure in the Mass is like the skeleton of our bodies: it provides a stable place for the "muscle" of meaning to be attached. The regular structure helps us to focus on prayer.

When you are at Mass, consider the uniqueness of the texts, the prayers, the readings, the liturgical season and the community there.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

Finally, there must be no innovations unless the good of the Church genuinely and certainly requires them; and care must be taken that any new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing. (n°. 23)

Holy Mother Church is conscious that she must celebrate the saving work of her divine Spouse by devoutly recalling it... Recalling thus the mysteries of redemption, the Church opens to the faithful the riches of her Lord's powers and merits, so that these are in some way made present for all time, and the faithful are enabled to lay hold upon them and become filled with saving grace. (n°. 102)

General Instruction of the Roman Missal

The Mass consists in some sense of two parts, namely the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, these being so interconnected that they form but one single act of worship. (n°. 28)

G.K. Chesterton

"The Mass is very long and tiresome unless one loves God."

IN THE TRADITION

Take to heart these words which I command you today. Keep repeating them to your children. Recite them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them on your arm as a sign and let them be as a pendant on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:6-9

“Lord, who can comprehend even one of your words? We lose more of it than we grasp, like those who drink from a living spring. For God’s word offers different facets according to the capacity of the listener, and the Lord has portrayed his message in many colors, so that whoever gazes upon it can see in it what suits him. Within it he has buried manifold treasures, so that each of us might grow rich in seeking them out. [...] And so whenever anyone discovers some part of the treasure, he should not think that he has exhausted God’s word. Instead he should feel that this is all that he was able to find of the wealth contained in it. Nor should he say that the word is weak and sterile or look down on it simply because this portion was all that he happened to find. But precisely because he could not capture it all he should give thanks for its riches.”

Commentary on the Diatessaron,
Saint Ephrem

“By these words, the tongue has done its best; now we must apply the meditation of the heart. [...] Let us turn to this source of knowledge, and because at present you cannot see, make it your business to desire the divine vision.”

Tractates on the first letter of John,
Saint Augustine

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ “This living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit, is called Tradition, since it is distinct from Sacred Scripture, though closely connected to it. [...] Through Tradition, ‘the Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes.’”

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 78

☩ “Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God’ (DV 10) in which, as in a mirror, the pilgrim Church contemplates God, the source of all her riches..”

CCC, n°. 97

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Let us listen with quiet hearts to the Word of God. Let us meditate on how God in times past saved his people and in these, the last days, has sent us his Son as our Redeemer.

Instruction, Easter Vigil

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does the regular structure of the Mass provide an environment conducive to prayer?
2. What can repetition in Mass or in the liturgical cycle teach us about our faith?
3. How do authentic prayer and meditation on the mysteries of our salvation help us to be engaged in Mass?

FOR FURTHER READING

G.K. Chesterton, *The Ball and the Cross*, (New York: John Lane Company, 1909).



Episode 11: Unity and Diversity in the Mass

SUMMARY

The Church's most fundamental principle in the celebration of Mass is that of unity. She has no greater interest than to foster unity when remembering the great sacrifice of Christ for love of us. Our harmony with one another sacramentalizes our unity with him. Catholics express this unity by participating in the common texts, postures and gestures.

Saint Pope John XXIII was very clear when in 1959 he urged that Catholics observe "unity in necessary things, liberty in doubtful things, charity in all things—*in necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas.*"

In the celebration of the liturgy, there remains room for legitimate diversity. As the General Instruction of the Roman Missal notes however, adaptation is not to be arbitrary. From the early days of Christianity, the Church has recommended a common sense approach. Saint Augustine tells us certain things "ought to be observed for the sake of fellowship with those among whom we live." (Cf. *Letter to Januarius*, Chapter 2.)

General Instruction of the Roman Missal

In the celebration of Mass the faithful form a holy people, a people of God's own possession and a royal Priesthood, so that they may give thanks to God and offer the unblemished sacrificial Victim not only by means of the hands of the Priest but also together with him and so that they may learn to offer their very selves. They should, moreover, take care to show this by their deep religious sense and their charity toward brothers and sisters who participate with them in the same celebration.

They are consequently to avoid any appearance of singularity or division, keeping in mind that they have only one Father in heaven and that hence are all brothers or sisters one to the other. (n°. 95)

Moreover, they are to form one body, whether in hearing the Word of God, or in taking part in the prayers and in the singing, or above all by the common offering of the Sacrifice and by participating together at the Lord's table. This unity is beautifully apparent from the gestures and bodily postures observed together by the faithful. (n°. 96)

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

Liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations of the Church, which is the "sacrament of unity," namely, the holy people united and ordered under their bishops. (n°. 26)

Even in the liturgy, the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not implicate the faith or the good of the whole community... (n°. 37)

IN THE TRADITION

"He must increase; I must decrease."

John 3:30

Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself.

1 Corinthians 11:27-29

"When my mother followed me to Milan, she found the Church there not fasting on Saturday. She began to be troubled..." [...] Ambrose replied "observe the custom prevailing in whatever Church you come to..."

Letter to Januarius,
Saint Augustine

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ "Liturgical diversity can be a source of enrichment, but it can also provoke tensions, mutual misunderstandings, and even schisms. In this matter it is clear that diversity must not damage unity. It must express only fidelity to the common faith, to the sacramental signs that the Church has received from Christ, and to

hierarchical communion. Cultural adaptation also requires a conversion of heart and even, where necessary, a breaking with ancestral customs incompatible with the Catholic faith."

Catechism of the Catholic Church, n°. 1206

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Grant, we pray, almighty God,
that your Church
may always remain that holy people,
formed as one
by the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
which manifests to the world
the Sacrament of your holiness and unity
and leads it to the perfection of your charity.

Easter Vigil

As this reception
of your Holy Communion, O Lord,
foreshadows the union of the faithful in you,
so may it bring about unity in your Church.

Prayer after Communion, Eleventh Sunday

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is unity of expression the Church's most important value in the celebration of Mass?
2. What can you do to foster a deeper sense of unity in the liturgical assembly?
3. What roles are played by humility, patience, and charity during Mass?

FOR FURTHER READING

Pope John XXIII, *Ad Petri Cathedram*,
Encyclical Letter on Truth, Unity and
Peace in a Spirit of Charity, June 29, 1959.
Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, (New York:
New City Press, 2012).



Episode 12: Music and the Mass

SUMMARY

Music, in the mind of the Church, is not thought of as something added to the Mass; rather, music is an integral component of it. The Church describes her music as a treasure of inestimable value—and indeed, how rich is this musical heritage. As a unique combination of melody and word, sacred music was created for the worship of God; it forms a necessary part of the sacred liturgy.

From the earliest days of the Church, the Catholic tradition has understood the working of the Blessed Trinity as a dialogue of love—not simply a spoken dialogue, but an eternal love song. Fathers of the Church, such as Saint Augustine, show how this sacred music both expresses and inspires our religious devotion.

When we sing at Mass, we follow the example of the Trinity. When we participate in the hymn of praise of Jesus Christ to God his Father, when we join our voices to his, our song at Mass becomes a joining in the eternal love song of heaven.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

Christ Jesus, high priest of the new and eternal covenant, taking human nature, introduced into this earthly exile that hymn which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven. He joins the entire community of mankind to Himself, associating it with His own singing of this canticle of divine praise.

For he continues His priestly work through the agency of His Church, which is ceaselessly engaged in praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the whole world. She does this, not only by celebrating the Eucharist, but also in other ways, especially by praying the divine office. (n°. 83)

Musicam Sacram

Liturgical worship is given a more noble form when it is celebrated in song...

[T]he mystery of the liturgy, with its hierarchical and community nature, is more openly shown, the unity of hearts is more profoundly achieved by the union of voices, minds are more easily raised to heavenly things by the beauty of the sacred rites, and the whole celebration more clearly prefigures that

heavenly liturgy which is enacted in the holy city of Jerusalem.

Pastors of souls will therefore do all they can to achieve this form of celebration. (n°. 5)

IN THE TRADITION

“Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.”

Ephesian 5:18b-20

“How I wept, deeply moved by your hymns, songs, and the voices that echoed through your Church! What emotion I experienced in them! Those sounds flowed into my ears, distilling the truth in my heart. A feeling of devotion surged within me, and tears streamed down my face—tears that did me good.”

St. Augustine,
The Confessions

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ “The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for the pre-eminence is that, as a combination of sacred music and words, it forms a necessary or integral part of solemn liturgy.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 1156

☩ “Song and music are closely connected with the liturgical action. The criteria for their proper use are the beauty expressive of prayer, the unanimous participation of the assembly, and the sacred character of the celebration.”

CCC, n°. 1191

☩ “Religious singing by the people is to be intelligently fostered so that in devotions and sacred exercises, as also during liturgical services, the voices of the faithful may ring out according to the norms and requirements of the rubrics.”

Sacrosanctum Concilium, n°. 118

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Heavenly hosts on high
unite in singing your praises;
men and women on earth
and all creation join in.

Hymn to Christ the King
Palm Sunday

Grant, O Lord our God,
that your obedient family,
whom you have fed with the Bread of heaven,
may follow the example of Saint Teresa
and rejoice

to sing of your mercies for all eternity.

Prayer after Communion
St. Teresa of Jesus, October 15

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does our singing at Mass represent the song of heaven?
2. Since singing combines word and breath. What biblical images does this combination bring to mind?

FOR FURTHER READING

Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Instruction on Music in the Liturgy: Musicam Sacram*, March 5, 1967.

Gerald Dennis Gill, *Music in Catholic Liturgy*, (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2009).



Episode 13: Music and *Musicam Sacram*

SUMMARY

The 1967 Instruction, *Musicam Sacram*, is the most definitive statement on music in the Mass since the Second Vatican Council. This Instruction both clarifies and articulates the Church's understanding of sacred music.

Musicam Sacram describes three degrees or categories of texts of the Mass to be sung.

The first category—and the most important—includes the parts of the Mass that are dialogues. Since the Trinity is a “dialogue of love,” how appropriate that we imitate God’s own example! These are the chants that make up the “Order of Mass.” The third edition of the Roman Missal includes the musical patterns for each of these chants—dialogues between the priest and the people, the deacon and the people, and the lector and the people. As Pope Benedict XVI says, “God speaks to and encounters men and women, making himself known in dialogue.” (*Verbum Domini*, n°. 22)

The second category includes the “Ordinary of the Mass.” Texts such as the *Kyrie*, *Gloria*,

Creed, and the *Lamb of God* are found in this group. According to *Musicam Sacram*, they should only be sung if the first category is sung.

The third category is comprised of the “Proper of the Mass.” It is characterized by things that change from Mass to Mass, such as the *Entrance Song*, the *Offertory Song* and the *Communion Song*. In the mind of the Church, these are the last texts to be sung. When we sing the dialogues of the Mass, our prayer resembles more and more the eternal love song of the Trinity.

Musicam Sacram

For the choice of parts to be sung, those should be first that of their nature are more important and particularly those sung by the priest or other ministers and answered by the congregation or sung by the priest and congregation together. (n°. 7)

The real solemnity of a liturgical service, it should be kept in mind, depends not on a more ornate musical style or more ceremonial splendor but on a worthy and reverent celebration. (n°. 11)

IN THE TRADITION

“The word of God draws each of us into a conversation with the Lord; the God who speaks teaches us how to speak to him. ... In this way our word to God becomes God’s word, thus confirming the dialogical nature of all Christian revelation, and our whole existence becomes a dialogue with the God who speaks and listens, who calls us and gives direction to our lives. Here the word of God reveals that our entire life is under the divine call.”

Pope Benedict XVI
Verbum Domini, n°. 24

“As part of the enhancement of the word of God in the liturgy, attention should also be paid to the use of song at the times called for by the particular rite. Preference should be given to songs which are of clear biblical inspiration and which express, through the harmony of music and words, the beauty of God’s word. We would do well to make the most of those songs handed down to us by the Church’s tradition which respect this criterion. I think in particular of the importance of Gregorian chant.”

Pope Benedict XVI
Verbum Domini, n°. 70

“The dignity and lofty purpose of sacred music consists in the fact that its lovely melodies and splendor beautify and embellish the voices of the priest who offers Mass and of the Christian people who praise the Sovereign God.”

Pope Pius XII
Musicæ Sacrae Disciplina, n°. 31

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ “Song and music fulfill their function as signs in a manner all the more significant when they are ‘more closely connected...with the liturgical action,’ according to three principal criteria: beauty expressive of prayer, the

unanimous participation of the assembly at the designated moments, and the solemn character of the celebration.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church, n°. 1157

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, stand between the porch and the altar and weep and cry out:
Spare, O Lord, spare your people;
do not close the mouths
of those who sing your praise, O Lord.

Antiphon, Distribution of Ashes
Ash Wednesday

The singing of the people, the ministers, and the Priest Celebrant has a special importance in the celebrations of these days, for when texts are sung, they have their proper impact. Pastors should, therefore, not fail to explain to the Christian faithful, as best they can, the meaning and order of the celebrations and to prepare them for active and fruitful participation.

Rubric 2
Sacred Paschal Triduum

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What distinguishes “sung dialogues” from the singing of hymnody?
2. What is the difference between “singing the Mass” and “singing at Mass”?
3. Why does the Church give “the main place” to Gregorian Chant?

FOR FURTHER READING

Gerald Dennis Gill, *Music in Catholic Liturgy*, (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2009).
Edward Schaefer, *Catholic Music through the Ages*, (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2008).



Episode 14: What is the Collect?

SUMMARY

“Collect” is the official term for what is generally known as the Opening Prayer of the Mass. This term is significant because it suggests how we ought to approach the opening oration.

The prayer is preceded by the invitation of the priest: “Let us pray.” Note that these words do not mean “Bring me the book,” or “Please stand,” or “Watch while I turn through the pages,” or even “Listen to this prayer.” The invitation means first and foremost “Let us formulate the intentions we want to offer at this Mass.”

In silence, the entire assembly is joined in prayer. The Collect gathers these silent prayers. At the Preparation of the Offerings, let the silence be an opportunity for each to say, “Lord, I offer myself to you, completely and entirely.” After Holy Communion, let it be “O Lord, thank you for this great gift of yourself; unite me to yourself.” In the end, every participant in the Mass should learn to pray in the silence. This single effort could totally change our experience of the Mass.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

The prayers addressed to God by the priest who presides over the assembly in the person of Christ are said in the name of the entire holy people and of all present. [...] Thus not only when things are read “which were written for our instruction” (Rom. 15:4), but also when the Church prays or sings or acts, the faith of those taking part is nourished and their minds are raised to God, so that they may offer Him their rational service and more abundantly receive His grace. (n°. 33)

Roman Missal

Next the Priest calls upon the people to pray and everybody, together with the Priest, observes a brief silence so that they may become aware of being in God’s presence and may call to mind their intentions. Then the Priest pronounces the prayer usually called the “Collect” and through which the character of the celebration finds expression. By an ancient tradition of the Church, the Collect prayer is usually addressed to God the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

General Instruction, n°. 54

The Priest then calls upon the people to pray, saying, with hands joined, *Let us pray*. All pray silently with the Priest for a brief time. Then the Priest, with hands extended, says the Collect, at the end of which the people acclaim, *Amen*.

General Instruction, n°. 127

IN THE TRADITION

“Then we all rise together and offer prayers for ourselves [...] and for all others, wherever they may be, so that we may be found righteous by our life and actions, and faithful to the commandments, so as to obtain eternal salvation.”

St. Justin Martyr
Apology, I, 65

“When he who is to ‘collect’ the prayer rises from the ground, they all stand up at once, [...] lest it should be thought that he has offered his own prayer independently instead of following the leader to the close.”

St. John Cassian
Institutes, Book II, Chapter 7

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

† ‘In the name of the whole Church’ does not mean that priests are the delegates of the community. The prayer and offering of the Church are inseparable from the prayer and offering of Christ, her head; it is always the case that Christ worships in and through his Church. The whole Church, the Body of Christ, prays and offers herself ‘through him, with him, in him,’ in the unity of the Holy Spirit, to God the Father. The whole Body, *caput et membra*, prays and offers itself, and therefore those who in the Body are especially his ministers are called ministers not only of

Christ, but also of the Church. It is because the ministerial priesthood represents Christ that it can represent the Church.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 1553

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Attend to the pleas of your people with heavenly care,
O Lord, we pray,
that they may see what must be done
and gain strength to do what they have seen.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How can we be more disciplined in our participation at Mass so that we mean what we say?
2. What are the recurring concerns you like to bring to prayer during the Mass?
3. The Collects first address God, then they present a petition. What connection can you make between this prayer and yours?

FOR FURTHER READING

James G. Leachman, osb and Daniel P. McCarthy, osb, *Appreciating the Collect: An Irenic Methodology*, (Farnborough, Hampshire: St. Michael’s Abbey Press, 2008).

Lauren Pristas, *The Collects of the Roman Missals of 1962 and 2002: A Comparative Study of the Sundays in Proper Seasons before and after the Second Vatican Council*, (London; New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013).



Episode 15: Liturgy & Language

SUMMARY

A frequent question, especially in light of the translation of the third edition of the Roman Missal, concerns the language of the Mass. Why do the words of Mass sound so different from the language we use in everyday life? Human beings express spiritual realities through cultural language, gestures and actions. Thus the Catechism teaches that one source for understanding Mass is found in human culture. Every culture has its own language. Every language develops within the context of a particular culture. Eskimo culture, for example, uses many different words for “snow.” French culture has an entire vocabulary focused on wine and wine-making and another for bread and bread-making. We know instinctively to use a particular kind of language that is suited to the circumstances or occasion: we speak to children one way, but use different linguistic registers when speaking to loved ones, friends, colleagues, or employers. An anecdote from American history provides an interesting example of this. On July 4, 1863, after the Union Army’s victory at Gettysburg,

some reporters asked President Lincoln for comment.

“How long is it—eighty odd years—since on the Fourth of July for the first time in the history of the world a nation, by its representatives, assembled and declared as a self-evident truth that ‘all men are created equal...’ This is a glorious theme, and the occasion for a speech, but I am not prepared to make one worthy of the occasion.” Months later, that language was revised to reflect the solemnity of the occasion. At the dedication of Soldiers’ National Cemetery, the President took up the theme with an enriched vocabulary: “Fourscore and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation...” (November 19, 1863)

Something similar occurs in the Mass. When speaking of the awesome mystery which is God, we use language that is appropriate to the context and the solemnity of the occasion. The language of the Mass is not the language of Main Street, USA, but of Main Street, Heaven.

Our task is to make our language less like this world and more like that of the world to come.

IN THE TRADITION

“Lord, who can comprehend even one of your words? We lose more of it than we grasp, like those who drink from a living spring. For God’s word offers different facets according to the capacity of the listener, and the Lord has portrayed his message in many colors... Be glad then that you are overwhelmed, and do not be saddened because he has overcome you. A thirsty man is happy when he is drinking, and he is not depressed because he cannot exhaust the spring.”

St. Ephrem,
Commentary on the Diatessaron

human representations. Our human words always fall short of the mystery of God.”

CCC, n°. 42

☩ “[T]he greatest prudence and attention is required in the preparation of liturgical books marked by sound doctrine, which are exact in wording, free from all ideological influence, and otherwise endowed with those qualities by which the sacred mysteries of salvation and the indefectible faith of the Church are efficaciously transmitted by means of human language to prayer, and worthy worship is offered to God the Most High.”

Liturgiam Authenticam, n°. 3

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ “A sacramental celebration is woven from signs and symbols. In keeping with the divine pedagogy of salvation, their meaning is rooted in the work of creation and in human culture, specified by the events of the Old Covenant and fully revealed in the person and work of Christ.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 1145

☩ “In human life, signs and symbols occupy an important place. As a being at once body and spirit, man expresses and perceives spiritual realities through physical signs and symbols. As a social being, man needs signs and symbols to communicate with others, through language, gestures, and actions. the same holds true for his relationship with God.”

CCC, n°. 1146

☩ “God transcends all creatures. We must therefore continually purify our language of everything in it that is limited, image-bound or imperfect, if we are not to confuse our image of God—the inexpressible, the incomprehensible, the invisible, the ungraspable—with our

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

O God, save me by your name;
by your power, defend my cause.
O God, hear my prayer;
give ear to the words of my mouth.

Entrance Antiphon
Friday, Fourth Week of Lent

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What prayers or words of the Mass remind you that our true home is in heaven?
2. What makes the setting at Mass different from other settings where we encounter people every day?

FOR FURTHER READING

Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Liturgiam authenticam: fifth instruction on vernacular translation of the Roman liturgy*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2001).



Episode 16: The Liturgist & Liturgiologist

SUMMARY

What is the difference between a liturgist and a liturgiologist? This is an important question because the answer has an impact on how we approach participation in the Mass. A liturgist is one who offers public worship of God. The Church teaches that Christ is the Supreme Liturgist, offering himself entirely to the Father. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy insists that Christ himself is the priest. The Liturgy is the action of Christ and of his Body, the Church. Following the pattern of Christ, then, the liturgist is the one who actually prays at Mass.

The liturgiologist, on the other hand, studies the liturgy, critiques it, evaluates it. The liturgiologist stands outside the liturgy and, in doing so, it is clear that this one is not praying.

If Christ himself is the liturgist, our prayer is effective because we join our worship to his. With Christ, we offer ourselves to the Father. We let go of what we want individually. This attitude is essential for real participation in the Mass. This participation requires that we let go of what we want for the sake of the common

good—that is, for the sake of the Body of Christ.

Genuine and authentic participation requires that we let go of ourselves and follow the model of Saint John the Baptist who says, “I must decrease so that Christ may increase.” (Cf. John 3:30).

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

Rightly, then, the liturgy is considered as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. In the liturgy the sanctification of man is signified by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which corresponds with each of these signs; in the liturgy the whole public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and His members.

From this it follows that every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the priest and of His Body which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others; no other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree. (n° 7)

Roman Missal

Attention must therefore be paid to what is determined by this General Instruction and by the traditional practice of the Roman Rite and to what serves the common spiritual good of the People of God, rather than private inclination or arbitrary choice.

General Instruction, n°. 42

[T]he Priest should be attentive rather to the common spiritual good of the People of God than to his own inclinations.

General Instruction, n°. 352

IN THE TRADITION

"In obedience, therefore, to her Founder's behest, the Church prolongs the priestly mission of Jesus Christ mainly by means of the sacred liturgy. She does this in the first place at the altar, where constantly the sacrifice of the cross is represented and with a single difference in the manner of its offering, renewed. She does it next by means of the sacraments, those special channels through which men are made partakers in the supernatural life. She does it, finally, by offering to God, all Good and Great, the daily tribute of her prayer of praise." [...] "The sacred liturgy is, consequently, the public worship which our Redeemer as Head of the Church renders to the Father, as well as the worship which the community of the faithful renders to its Founder, and through Him to the heavenly Father. It is, in short, the worship rendered by the Mystical Body of Christ in the entirety of its Head and members."

Pope Pius XII,
Mediator Dei

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ "The liturgy is the work of the whole Christ, head and body. Our high priest celebrates it unceasingly in the heavenly liturgy, with the holy Mother of God, the apostles, all the saints, and the multitude of those who have already entered the kingdom."

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 1187

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

[G]rant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ.

Eucharistic Prayer III

Gladden us with holy joys, almighty God, and make us rejoice with devout thanksgiving, for the Ascension of Christ your Son is our exaltation, and, where the Head has gone before in glory, the Body is called to follow in hope.

Collect
Ascension of the Lord

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Genuine participation in the Mass provides an opportunity for each to exercise the Christian virtues of patience, humility and charity. For which virtue do you need to pray?
2. Why is it important to actually pray at Mass rather than evaluate its performance?

FOR FURTHER READING

Pope Pius XII, *Encyclical on the Sacred Liturgy: Mediator Dei*, November 20, 1947.



Episode 17: Liturgical Vestments, part 1

SUMMARY

The vestments worn during Mass are sacramental signs. This suggests that they not only serve the practical purpose of covering street clothes, but that they also represent hidden realities. They signify that the celebration of the liturgy is not something ordinary, but that it takes us beyond the experience of daily life.

The Church teaches that most fundamental sacred garment is the alb. (The word has a Latin root which means white. "Albino" and "albumen" are English cognates.)

The alb is the long white garment worn by the sacred ministers. It recalls the new and immaculate clothing that every Christian has received in baptism: "see in this white garment the outward sign of your Christian dignity."

Before the alb is put on, another sacred vestment, called the amice it put on over the head and around the shoulders to completely cover the ordinary clothing. For priests and deacons the amice covers the Roman collar. The amice symbolizes the helmet of salvation mentioned by St. Paul in the Letter to the Ephesians: "In all circumstances, hold faith as

a shield, to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." The prayer said by the minister asks God's protection as he performs his duties. The cincture is the rope-like belt tied around the waist of the minister. It signifies the minister's commitment to the virtue of chastity. The prayer calls to mind the fruits of the Spirit noted by St. Paul in the Letter to the Galatians: "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." (5:22)

These common, simple vestments, the amice, alb and cincture, clothe the minister, preparing him to enter into the sacred function.

Our task is to make our language less like this world and more like that of the world to come.

Roman Missal

In the Church, which is the Body of Christ, not all members have the same function. This diversity of offices is shown outwardly in the celebration of the Eucharist by the diversity of sacred vestments, which must therefore be a sign of the function proper to each minister.

General Instruction, n°. 335

The sacred garment common to all ordained and instituted ministers of any rank is the alb, to be tied at the waist with a cincture unless it is made so as to fit even without such. Before the alb is put on, should this not completely cover the ordinary clothing at the neck, an amice should be used.

General Instruction, n°. 336

IN THE TRADITION

“Then one of the elders spoke up and said to me, ‘Who are these wearing white robes, and where did they come from?’ I said to him, ‘My lord, you are the one who knows.’ He said to me, ‘These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress, they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’”

Revelation 7:13-14

“Therefore, gird up the loins of your mind, live soberly, and set your hopes completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

1 Peter 1:13

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ “Thus we observe that when God institutes the Old Law, He makes provision besides for sacred rites, and determines in exact detail the rules to be observed by His people in rendering Him the worship He ordains. To this end He established various kinds of sacrifice and designated the ceremonies with which they were to be offered to Him. His enactments on all matters relating to the Ark of the Covenant, the Temple and the holy days are minute and clear. He established a sacerdotal tribe with its high priest, selected and described the vestments with which the sacred ministers were to be clothed, and every function in any way

pertaining to divine worship. Yet this was nothing more than a faint foreshadowing of the worship which the High Priest of the New Testament was to render to the Father in heaven.”

Mediator Dei, n°. 16

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Place upon me, O Lord, the helmet of salvation, that I may overcome the assaults of the devil.

Prayer for the Amice

Make me white, O Lord, and cleanse my heart; that being made white in the Blood of the Lamb I may deserve an eternal reward.

Prayer for the Alb

Gird me, O Lord, with the cincture of purity, and quench in my heart the fire of concupiscence, that the virtue of continence and chastity may abide in me.

Prayer for the Cincture

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How do the liturgical vestments worn at Mass help us to recall the vision of heaven in the Eternal Banquet?
2. How can the clothing worn by the laity be an expression of their commitment to the Christian virtues?
3. What does our clothing demonstrate about the value of what we are celebrating?

FOR FURTHER READING

Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, March 25, 2004.



Episode 18: Liturgical Vestments, part 2

SUMMARY

The alb, along with the amice and cincture, is the sacred garment common to ordained and instituted ministers.

Other vestments are worn by those in Holy Orders, the Deacon and the Priest. The first of these vestments is the stole. The stole is a wide band of cloth that in the case of the deacon is worn over the left shoulder and is attached at the right hip. It signifies his diaconal office: the office of ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Charity. For the priest, the stole is worn around the neck, with both ends hanging in front of the alb. The stole is never worn over the chasuble or dalmatic.

The outer garment for the deacon is a tunic-like vestment called a dalmatic; it represents his diaconal service. The ministry of deacons is first described in the sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

The chasuble, which is the priest's outer garment, was originally designed to entirely envelop him. When the priest dons the chasuble, he recalls the words of St. Paul to the Colossians as well as the Lord's words in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "my yoke is sweet."

The sacred vestments provide distance from the mundane reality of everyday life. They become a sacramental sign of the wedding garments of eternity, and prepare both faithful and ministers for the foretaste of the heavenly liturgy celebrated in our churches.

Roman Missal

The vestment proper to the Priest Celebrant at Mass and during other sacred actions directly connected with Mass is the chasuble worn, unless otherwise indicated, over the alb and stole.

General Instruction, n°. 337

The vestment proper to the Deacon is the dalmatic, worn over the alb and stole; however, the dalmatic may be omitted out of necessity or on account of a lesser degree of solemnity.

General Instruction, n°. 338

Virgil Michel, osb.

"The externals of the liturgy are there to express and reveal the internal, they are the visible embodiment of the divine powers exercised in all liturgical functions, the visible expression of the sentiments uniting the members of the

mystical body of Christ among themselves and with their Head.”

IN THE TRADITION

“Above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfection.”

Colossians 3:14

“So the Twelve called together the community of the disciples and said, ‘It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to serve at table. Brothers, select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to this task.’”

Acts 6:2-3

“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”

Matthew 11:28-30

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ “Let the holiness of your lives be a delightful fragrance to Christ’s faithful, so that by word and example you may build up the house which is God’s Church.

Likewise you will exercise in Christ the office of sanctifying. For by your ministry the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful will be made perfect, being united to the sacrifice of Christ, which will be offered through your hands in an unbloody way on the altar, in union with the faithful, in the celebration of the sacraments. Understand, therefore, what you do and imitate what you celebrate.”

Rite of Ordination of a Priest

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord, restore the stole of immortality, which I lost through the collusion of our first parents, and, unworthy as I am to approach Thy sacred mysteries, may I yet gain eternal joy.

Prayer for the Stole

Lord, endow me with the garment of salvation, the vestment of joy, and with the dalmatic of justice ever encompass me.

Prayer for the Dalmatic

O Lord, who has said, “My yoke is sweet and my burden light,” grant that I may so carry it as to merit Thy grace.

Prayer for the Chasuble

O God,
who willed your Son to submit for our sake
to the yoke of the Cross,
so that you might drive from us
the power of the enemy,
grant us, your servants,
to attain the grace of the resurrection.

Collect, Wednesday of Holy Week

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why does the Church make a connection between the “yoke” of ministry and the chasuble of the priest?
2. How are the sleeves of the Deacon’s dalmatic a reminder of his service?

FOR FURTHER READING

Virgil Michel, *The Liturgy of the Church according to the Roman Rite*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937).

James Charles Noonon, Jr., *The Church Visible*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1996)



Episode 19: The Door of the Church

SUMMARY

The door of the church is not simply a practical or pragmatic thing; it is not simply for entry and exit. The door of every church is a sacramental sign that reminds us of our future entry into paradise. The Church's worship always moves us in the direction of our heavenly homeland. Every church is dedicated before it is put into service for worship; the prayer of dedication tells us what the church building and its furnishings signify.

From the moment of the opening of the doors, the crossing of the threshold, of the entering in, the doorway becomes significant. This is the place where couples about to be united in Holy Matrimony are greeted by the Church's official representative. This is the place, too, where that same couple will be greeted again as they carry their children for Baptism. Here, again, is the station where mourners pause as they carry their deceased loved one a final time to church for the Mass of Christian burial. Every Catholic, crossing this threshold, pauses to dip fingers into holy water and trace the Sign of the Cross.

The Roman Pontifical

Because the church is a visible building, this house is a special sign of the pilgrim Church on earth and an image of the Church dwelling in heaven.

The Order of the Dedication of a Church, n°. 2

A church, as its nature requires, should be suitable for sacred celebrations, dignified, evincing a noble beauty, not mere costly display, and it should truly be a sign and symbol of heavenly realities.

The Order of the Dedication of a Church, n°. 3

The door of the church to be dedicated should be closed.

The Order of the Dedication of a Church, n°. 29

When the door is unlocked, the Bishop invites the people to enter the church...

The Order of the Dedication of a Church, n°. 34

Otto Von Simson

"The church is, mystically and liturgically, an image of heaven... The authoritative language of the dedication ritual of a church explicitly relates the vision of the Celestial City, as

described in the Book of Revelation, to the building that is to be erected.”

IN THE TRADITION

“O gates, lift high your heads;
grow higher, ancient doors.
Let him enter the king of glory!
Who is this king of glory?
He, the Lord of hosts,
he is the king of glory.”

Psalm 24:9-10

“Enter the gates of the Lord with thanksgiving,
His courts with songs of praise.”

Psalm 100:4

“The way lies open from earth to heaven. Let the prophet’s trumpet sound again... The King of glory will make his way in, to intercede for us at the Father’s right hand.”

Saint Augustine
Exposition on Psalm 24 (23)

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ “The Church is a sheepfold whose one and indispensable door is Christ. It is a flock of which God Himself foretold He would be the shepherd, and whose sheep, although ruled by human shepherds; are nevertheless continuously led and nourished by Christ Himself, the Good Shepherd and the Prince of the shepherds, who gave His life for the sheep.”

Lumen Gentium, n°. 6

☩ “In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims ...”

Sacrosanctum Concilium, n°. 8

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Grant that, with all our brothers and sisters who will celebrate the divine mysteries in this church,
we may come at last to the heavenly Jerusalem.

Dedication of a Church

Almighty ever-living God,
pour out your grace upon this place
and extend the gift of your help
to all who call upon you,
that the power of your word and
of the Sacraments
may strengthen here
the hearts of all the faithful.

Collect for the Dedication of a Church

Here may the Gospel of peace resound
and the sacred mysteries be celebrated,
so that your faithful,
formed by the word of life and by divine grace
on their pilgrim way through the earthly city,
may merit to reach the eternal Jerusalem.

Intercessions, Eucharistic Prayer III for the Dedication of a Church

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Many of the Church’s sacramental rites begin at the door of the church. Which ones can you name?
2. The crossing of a threshold represents the progression from one place or from one state to another. What significant crossings in the Sacred Scriptures are symbolized in the sacramental life?

FOR FURTHER READING

Otto Von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order*, (Princeton University Press, 1988).



Episode 20: The Meaning of Incense

SUMMARY

The Church herself tells us that incense is an expression of reverence and prayer. She prays along with Psalm 141: "Let my prayer be incense before you; my uplifted hands an evening offering." The Book of Revelation also gives an understanding of the use of incense, even in heaven: the incense is joined to the prayer of the saints around the throne of God. St. Paul goes even further to suggest that not only does incense represent prayer, it signifies also the Christian: "we are the aroma of Christ." (2 Corinthians 2:15) Incense is a sacramental sign that can be seen, smelled, and even heard.

The different levels of reverence indicate the way the incense is used at Mass. Three swings of the censor or thurible may be given to the Blessed Sacrament at the consecration and also to anything in the Mass that represents Christ: the priest, the people, the Book of Gospels, the Paschal Candle, the Cross. Two swings are reserved for images and relics of saints. A single swing is used when incensing around the altar. Incense may be used at five different times during Mass: the Entrance Procession, at the

beginning of Mass to incense the cross and altar, at the Gospel, the Offertory, and during the Eucharistic Prayer at the elevation of the consecrated host and chalice.

When we see the incense, let us think of our prayers rising to heaven, up to the throne of God. When we inhale its fragrance, let us remind ourselves that in this world we are to be the sweet odor of Christ. When incense is used at Mass, let us recall our participation in the heavenly liturgy described in the Book of Revelation.

The Roman Pontifical

Incense is burned on the altar to signify that the Sacrifice of Christ, which is there perpetuated in mystery, ascends to God as an odor of sweetness; this is also a sign that the pleasing and acceptable prayers of the faithful rise up to the throne of God.

Moreover, the incensation of the main body of the church indicates that the dedication makes it a house of prayer; but the People of God are incensed first, for they are the living temple in which each faithful member is a spiritual altar.

The Order of the Dedication of a Church, n°. 17

IN THE TRADITION

“Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a gold censer. He was given a great quantity of incense to offer, along with the prayers of all the holy ones, on the gold altar that was before the throne. The smoke of the incense along with the prayers of the holy ones went up before God from the hand of the angel.”

Revelation 8:3-4

“Let my prayer be incense before you; my uplifted hands an evening offering.”

Psalm 141:2

“The fire [of martyrdom] produced the likeness of a vaulted chamber, like a ship’s sail bellying to the breeze, and surrounded the martyr’s body as with a wall; and he was in the center of it, not as burning flesh, but as bread that is baking, or as gold and silver refined in a fire! In fact, we even caught an aroma such as the scent of incense or of some other precious spice.”

The Martyrdom of Saint Polycarp

“The evening sacrifice is the Lord’s passion, the Lord’s cross, the offering of the saving victim in a holocaust acceptable to God. [...] Because of him, every prayer purely directed from the heart of a believer rises like incense, as from a holy altar. Nothing is more delightful than this fragrance of the Lord. May all who believe send forth the same fragrance.”

Saint Augustine
Exposition on Psalm 141 (140)

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ “To accomplish so great a work, Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of

His minister [...] but especially under the Eucharistic species. [...] He is present in His word [...] He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings...”

Sacrosanctum Concilium, n°. 7

☩ “In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims ...”

Sacrosanctum Concilium, n°. 8

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Let our prayer rise, O Lord,
like incense in your sight;
and as this house is filled
with a pleasing fragrance,
so let your Church be fragrant
with the aroma of Christ.

Dedication of a Church

We beseech you, almighty God,
that those you renew by your Sacraments
may merit to become
the pleasing fragrance of Christ.
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

Prayer after Communion, Chrism Mass

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Incense used at Mass has a variety of meanings. Which one speaks most significantly to you?
2. How can Christians be the “sweet aroma of Christ” in the world?

FOR FURTHER READING

Louis Bouyer, *Rite and Man: Natural Sacredness and Christian Liturgy*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1967).



Episode 21: Bows in the Liturgy

SUMMARY

The liturgy is comprised not only of words and music, it also includes gestures. These, too, are sacramental signs because they show in a visible way the hidden devotion of our hearts. A bow signifies reverence or honor to persons or the symbols that represent these persons.

There are two types of bows in the Roman Rite. A simple bow of the head is made during the naming of the Persons of the Blessed Trinity, at the name of Jesus, at the naming of the Blessed Virgin, the saint of the day and even the patron saint. A simple bow of the head is made by the communicant before the reception of Holy Communion.

A profound bow, or a bow of the body is made by the priest on several occasions during Mass: in the preparation of the Offerings, in Eucharistic Prayer I, and sometimes in reverence to the altar.

A profound bow is made by the deacon, when asks the priest's blessing before reading the Gospel.

The profound bow is made by all the ministers and the assembly during the Creed when we say the words that recall Christ's incarnation.

We Catholics put into our bodies what we believe. The profound reverence for God, for Christ, for the mysteries we celebrate is manifest in our bodies whenever we bow.

The Roman Missal

A bow signifies reverence and honor shown to the persons themselves or to the signs that represent them. There are two kinds of bow: a bow of the head and a bow of the body.

a) A bow of the head is made when the three Divine Persons are named together and at the names of Jesus, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of the Saint in whose honor Mass is being celebrated.

b) A bow of the body, that is to say, a profound bow, is made to the altar; [...] in the Creed [...]; in the Roman Canon [...] The same kind of bow is made by the Deacon when he asks for a blessing before the proclamation of the Gospel. In addition, the Priest bows slightly as he pronounces the words of the Lord at the Consecration.

General Instruction, n°. 275

When receiving Holy Communion, the communicant bows his or her head before the

Sacrament as a gesture of reverence and receives the Body of the Lord from the minister. The consecrated host may be received either on the tongue or in the hand, at the discretion of each communicant. When Holy Communion is received under both kinds, the sign of reverence is also made before receiving the Precious Blood.

General Instruction, n°. 160

IN THE TRADITION

“God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Philippians 2:9-11

“He is the Lord our God. And what are we? We need to know, if we are to fall down before him without fear. We are the people of his pasture.”

Saint Augustine
Exposition on Psalm 95 (94)

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ “The human body shares in the dignity of the ‘image of God’: it is a human body precisely because it is animated by a spiritual soul, and it is the whole human person that is intended to become, in the body of Christ, a temple of the Spirit.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church, n°. 364

☩ “We learn from the same Apostle that we must always bear about in our body the dying of Jesus, so that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodily frame. This is why we

ask the Lord in the sacrifice of the Mass that, ‘receiving the offering of the spiritual victim,’ he may fashion us for himself ‘as an eternal gift.’”

Sacrosanctum Concilium, n°. 12

☩ “To promote active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and songs, as well as by actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes. And at the proper times all should observe a reverent silence.”

Sacrosanctum Concilium, n°. 30

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

All the earth shall bow down before you,
O God,
and shall sing to you,
shall sing to your name, O Most High!

Entrance Antiphon, Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Pour out a spirit of compunction, O God,
on those who bow before your majesty,
and by your mercy may they merit the rewards
you promise
to those who do penance.

Prayer over the People, Ash Wednesday

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do bows, genuflections, and prostrations have in common?
2. How can we connect external actions with our interior devotion?

FOR FURTHER READING

Klemens Richter, *The Meaning of Sacramental Symbols: Answers to Today's Questions*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990).



Episode 22: The Book of Gospels

SUMMARY

The Church teaches that the proclamation of the Gospel is the high point of the Liturgy of the Word, the first part of Mass. The Gospel is so significant that the Church has a special book that contains just those words. The Book of Gospels, the repository for the Word of Christ, is another symbol of the Lord present to the church. Since it is his own word, the proclamation of the Gospel is honored with a kiss and candles and incense as if it were Christ himself.

This is why the Book of Gospels is carried in procession. It precedes those who by virtue of Holy Orders are more closely conformed to Christ. This is also why the Book is placed flat on the altar, which is another symbol of Christ. The altar receives the Word of Christ as it receives his Body.

The proclamation of the Gospel during Mass is always the Deacon's responsibility, a ministerial role. It is a role that differs from the preaching of the homily.

As the Gospel is proclaimed, let us also honor it by receiving it in our hearts, allowing it to take root and to bear fruit in our lives.

The Roman Missal

The reading of the Gospel constitutes the high point of the Liturgy of the Word. The Liturgy itself teaches the great reverence that is to be shown to this reading by setting it off from the other readings with special marks of honor, by the fact of which minister is appointed to proclaim it and by the blessing or prayer with which he prepares himself; and also by the fact that through their acclamations the faithful acknowledge and confess that Christ is present and is speaking to them and stand as they listen to the reading; and by the mere fact of the marks of reverence that are given to the Book of the Gospels.

General Instruction, n°. 60

The function of proclaiming the readings is by tradition not presidential but ministerial. Therefore the readings are to be read by a reader, but the Gospel by the Deacon or, in his absence, by another Priest. If, however, a Deacon or another Priest is not present, the Priest Celebrant himself should read the Gospel.

General Instruction, n°. 59

IN THE TRADITION

“But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’ ”

Revelation 10:14-15

“How sweet to my tongue is your promise,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Your word is a lamp for my feet,
a light for my path.”

Psalm 119:103, 105

“And so the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved by an unending succession of preachers until the end of time. Therefore the Apostles, handing on what they themselves had received, warn the faithful to hold fast to the traditions which they have learned either by word of mouth or by letter, and to fight in defense of the faith handed on once and for all. Now what was handed on by the Apostles includes everything which contributes toward the holiness of life and increase in faith of the peoples of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes.”

Dei Verbum, n°. 8

“It is common knowledge that among all the Scriptures, even those of the New Testament, the Gospels have a special preeminence, and rightly so, for they are the principal witness for the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Savior.”

Dei Verbum, n°. 18

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ “The Gospels are the heart of all Scriptures ‘because they are our principal source for the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Savior.’ ”

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 125

☩ “The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord: both nourish and govern the whole Christian life.”

CCC, n°. 141

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Bless your faithful, we pray, O Lord,
with a blessing that endures for ever,
and keep them faithful
to the Gospel of your Only Begotten Son,
so that they may always desire and at last attain
that glory
whose beauty he showed in his own Body,
to the amazement of his Apostles.

Prayer over the People, Second Sunday of Lent

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever wondered about the various reverences shown to the Book of Gospels?
2. Why does the Church teach that “the four Gospels occupy a central place” in the life of Christians? See *CCC*, n°. 139

FOR FURTHER READING

Jean Corbon, *The Wellspring of Worship*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005).



Episode 23: A Word on the Word

SUMMARY

If you want to say the word, “word” in Latin, there are two choices. You can say “*scriptum*” or you can say “*verbum*.” There is a very important distinction between the two words and the Church is very specific about the way she uses them in the text of the Mass.

“*Scriptum*” means the written word, the text on the page. “*Verbum*,” on the other hand, refers to the spoken word. The word said out loud has wings and can fly. While the word on the page is static.

This is why when we say “The word of the Lord,” we are referring to the spoken word. The Latin is “*Verbum Domini*.” We believe that the word of God is alive and active. The proclamation of the Word of God is an act of communication between God and the Faithful through the instrument of the reader who has a duty to proclaim the word clearly and with meaning. The hearers must be open to receiving it and letting it sink into their hearts. Every sacramental celebration includes the proclamation of the Scripture, as Psalm 119 says, “Your word, O Lord, is a lamp for my feet!”

The Roman Missal

After each reading, whoever reads it pronounces the acclamation, and by means of the reply the assembled people give honor to the Word of God that they have received in faith and with gratitude.

General Instruction, n°. 59

After the Collect, all sit. The Priest may, very briefly, introduce the faithful to the Liturgy of the Word. Then the reader goes to the ambo and, from the Lectionary already placed there before Mass, proclaims the First Reading, to which all listen. At the end, the reader pronounces the acclamation The word of the Lord, and all reply, Thanks be to God.

Then a few moments of silence may be observed, if appropriate, so that all may meditate on what they have heard.

General Instruction, n°. 128

Alberto Manguel

“The classic phrase *scripta manet, verba volat*—which has come to mean, in our time, ‘what is written remains, what is spoken vanishes into air’—used to express the exact opposite; it was coined in praise of the word said out loud,

which has wings and can fly, as compared to the silent word of the page, which is motionless, dead. Faced with a written text, the reader had a duty to lend voice to the silent letters, the *scripta*, and to allow them to become, in the delicate biblical distinction, *verba*, spoken words—spirit.”

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ “...Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. [...] He is present in His word [...] He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings...”

Sacrosanctum Concilium, n°. 7

IN THE TRADITION

“Indeed, the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart.”

Hebrews 4:12

“The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith that we preach), for, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Romans 10:8-9

“Thus faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.”

Romans 10:17

“John is the voice, but the Lord is the Word who was in the beginning. John is the voice that lasts for a time; from the beginning Christ is the Word who lives for ever. Take away the word, the meaning, and what is the voice? Where there is no understanding, there is only a meaningless sound. The voice without the word strikes the ear but does not build up the heart.”

Saint Augustine
Sermon 239

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

God our Father,
who, by sending into the world
the Word of truth
and the Spirit of sanctification,
made known to the human race
your wondrous mystery,
grant us, we pray,
that in professing the true faith
we may acknowledge
the Trinity of eternal glory
and adore your Unity, powerful in majesty.

Collect, Votive Mass for the Blessed Trinity

May the Lord be in your heart and on your lips,
that you may proclaim his Gospel
worthily and well,
in the name of the Father and of the Son and of
the Holy Spirit.

Blessing of Deacon, Order of Mass

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Are you aware of the extent to which the texts of the Mass are drawn from the Bible?
2. What liturgical texts resonate most with you?

FOR FURTHER READING

Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading*, (New York: Viking Press, 1996).



Episode 24: The Creed

SUMMARY

A frequent question concerns the first pronoun of the Creed. Why do we say “I believe” rather than “we” believe?

Notice that one of the first tasks of the liturgical assembly is for the different members to be formed into a single body. The “I” (ie., the first person singular pronoun) of the Creed is, in a sense, the “I” of the singular Body of Christ, who worships God the Father. It is also the personal “I” of the individual believer. This “I believe” of the Creed is able to account for the personal belief and the corporate belief of Christ’s mystical body. It is both a baptismal confession and a communal statement of shared faith.

The Letter of to the Corinthians tells us that the body has many members, but it is one body. The plural “we” signifies grammatically a collection of individuals; “we” is only a united body when it is understood as “I”.

Credo, I believe, signifies at one and the same time, my personal faith and the faith of the one body, the Church.

The Roman Missal

Moreover, they are to form one body, whether in hearing the Word of God, or in taking part in the prayers and in the singing, or above all by the common offering of the Sacrifice and by participating together at the Lord’s table. This unity is beautifully apparent from the gestures and bodily postures observed together by the faithful.

General Instruction, n°. 96

The purpose of the Creed or Profession of Faith is that the whole gathered people may respond to the Word of God proclaimed in the readings taken from Sacred Scripture and explained in the Homily and that they may also honor and confess the great mysteries of the faith by pronouncing the rule of faith in a formula approved for liturgical use and before the celebration of these mysteries in the Eucharist begins.

General Instruction, n°. 67

The Symbol or Creed is sung or recited by the Priest together with the people with everyone standing. At the words *et incarnatus est*, etc. (*and by the Holy Spirit...and became man*) all make a

profound bow; but on the Solemnities of the Annunciation and of the Nativity of the Lord, all genuflect.

General Instruction, n°. 137

IN THE TRADITION

“As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. ... Now you are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it.”

I Corinthians 12:12, 27

“*Hear, O God, my petition, listen to my prayer.* Who is speaking? An individual, it seems. See if it is an individual: *I cried to you from the ends of the earth while my heart was in anguish.* Now it is no longer one person; rather, it is one in the sense that Christ is one, and we are all his members. (...) This possession of Christ, this inheritance of Christ, this body of Christ, this one Church of Christ, this unity that we are, cries from the ends of the earth.”

Saint Augustine
Exposition of Psalm 60

“Where do you pasture your sheep, O Good Shepherd, you who carry on your shoulders the whole flock? For it is but one sheep, this entire human race whom you lift onto your shoulders.”

Gregory of Nyssa
Commentary on the Song of Songs

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ “Rightly, then, the liturgy is considered as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. In the liturgy the sanctification of the man is signified by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which corresponds with each of these signs; in the liturgy the whole

public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and His members.”

Sacrosanctum Concilium, n°. 7

☩ “Whoever says ‘I believe’ says ‘I pledge myself to what we believe.’ Communion in faith needs a common language of faith, normative for all and uniting all in the same confession of faith.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 185

☩ “The first ‘profession of faith’ is made during Baptism. The symbol of faith is first and foremost the baptismal creed.”

CCC, n°. 189

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Grant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ.

Eucharistic Prayer III

We pray, almighty God,
that we may always be counted among the
members of Christ,
in whose Body and Blood we have communion.

Prayer after Communion, Fifth Sunday of Lent

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What attitude is required for a group to be formed into a unified body?
2. How does the common faith expressed in the Creed unite us to Christ?

FOR FURTHER READING

Joseph Ratzinger, *The Feast of Faith*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).



Episode 25: Bow in the Creed

SUMMARY

There are two types of bows in the Catholic Mass: a simple bow of the head and a profound bow or bow of the body. During the recitation of the Creed, the Church asks all the faithful to make a profound bow. It is meant to be a tremendous sign of the reverence we have for the mysteries we celebrate in Holy Mass.

As a foundational dogma, Catholics believe that the Eternal God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity humbles himself when he comes down from heaven to take on the earth of our human flesh. This is the mystery of the Incarnation. God grounds himself when he leaves heaven to walk among us on earth. This mystery is literally embodied during the Creed. Catholics put into their bodies what we believe. On two occasions during the church year, instead of a bow, the rubrics call for a genuflection at the words that express the Incarnation. Those two solemnities are the Annunciation (March 25) and the Nativity of the Lord (December 25). They are the two great feasts which celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation. In a genuflection, we physically touch our bodies to the ground. The bow

during the Creed signifies the same mystery as the genuflection. When the knee touches the ground in a genuflection, or the body bends toward the earth in a profound bow, let us recall the Incarnation. Let us put into our bodies what we believe. Let us imitate in our human flesh the humility of God himself. In the end, may our prayer make us more like Christ.

The Roman Missal

The Symbol or Creed is sung or recited by the Priest together with the people with everyone standing. At the words *et incarnatus est*, etc. (*and by the Holy Spirit...and became man*) all make a profound bow; but on the Solemnities of the Annunciation and of the Nativity of the Lord, all genuflect.

General Instruction, n°. 137

A bow signifies reverence and honor shown to the persons themselves or to the signs that represent them. There are two kinds of bow: a bow of the head and a bow of the body... A bow of the body, that is to say, a profound bow, is made ... in the Creed at the words *et incarnatus est*.

General Instruction, n°. 275

IN THE TRADITION

The LORD God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Genesis 2:7

All the earth shall bow down before you, O God,
and shall sing to you,
shall sing to your name, O Most High!

Psalm 66:4

Jesus humbled himself,
becoming obedient to death,
even death on a cross.
Because of this, God greatly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name
that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
of those in heaven and on earth and under the
earth,
and every tongue confess that
Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:8-11

“The truth is that the flesh is the very condition on which salvation hinges. And since the soul is, in consequence of its salvation, chosen for the service of God, it is the flesh which actually renders it capable of such service. The flesh, indeed, is washed, in order that the soul may be cleansed; the flesh is anointed, that the soul may be consecrated; the flesh is signed (with the cross), that the soul too may be fortified; the flesh is shadowed with the imposition of hands, that the soul also may be illuminated by the Spirit; the flesh feeds on the body and blood of Christ, that the soul likewise may fatten on its God.”

Tertullian

On the Resurrection of the Flesh, 8

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ “The flesh is the hinge of salvation. We believe in God who is creator of the flesh; we believe in the Word made flesh in order to redeem the flesh; we believe in the resurrection of the flesh, the fulfillment of both the creation and the redemption of the flesh.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church, n°. 1015

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Pour out a spirit of compunction, O God,
on those who bow before your majesty,
and by your mercy may they merit the rewards
you promise
to those who do penance.

Ash Wednesday
Prayer over the People

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what other ways do we manifest in our bodies what we believe as Catholics?
2. How does the celebration of the various sacraments involve the use of the human body?
3. How can we more fully imitate the humility of Christ?

FOR FURTHER READING

Romano Guardini, *Sacred Signs* (St. Louis, MO: Pio Decimo Press, 1956).

Prosper Gueranger, *On the Holy Mass*, (Farnsborough, UK: St. Michael's Abbey Press, 2006).



Episode 26: The Altar

SUMMARY

The altar is the central feature of every Catholic church. It is the most significant element in the church building. (It is even more significant than the tabernacle, since without altar, there is no reserved Blessed Sacrament.)

The altar is the focal point of every liturgical celebration. The Church teaches us that Christ himself is the Victim; Christ is the Priest; Christ is the Altar of Sacrifice.

The Order of the Dedication of a Church can teach us much about the meaning of the altar. Until the altar is consecrated, it is treated as an inanimate object. At the beginning of the ceremony, the altar is ignored: there is no bow, no kiss, not even lighted candles. ("The Bishop, without kissing the altar, goes to the chair...." n°. 35) Before its consecration the altar is merely an object, a hunk of stone, a chunk of wood.

When it is put into service for the worship of God, the altar is first sprinkled with holy water. This constitutes a kind of washing or baptism; it is then anointed with Sacred Chrism. The altar is honored with incense, it is dressed with a white cloth, analogous to the garment of the

newly baptized. Candles are brought and, in the celebration of the Eucharist, the altar receives the Body of Christ. The altar, like the Christian at Baptism, is made another Christ. The altar is the permanent symbol of the presence of Christ for the Christian community.

The Roman Missal

The altar on which is effected the Sacrifice of the Cross made present under sacramental signs, is also the table of the Lord to which the People of God is convoked to participate in the Mass, and it is also the center of the thanksgiving that is accomplished through the Eucharist.

General Instruction, n°. 296

The altar should be built separate from the wall, in such a way that it is possible to walk around it easily and that Mass can be celebrated at it facing the people, which is desirable wherever possible. Moreover, the altar should occupy a place where it is truly the center toward which the attention of the whole congregation of the faithful naturally turns. The altar should usually be fixed and dedicated.

General Instruction, n°. 299

Romano Guardini

“The two altars, the one without and the one within, belong inseparably together. The visible altar at the heart of the church is but the external representation of the altar at the center of the human breast, which is God’s temple, of which the church with its walls and arches is but the expression and figure.”

IN THE TRADITION

“It was fitting that we should have such a high priest: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, higher than the heavens. He has no need, as did the high priests, to offer sacrifice day after day, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did that once for all when he offered himself.”

Hebrews 7:26-28

“The altar is an object of wonder: by nature it is stone, but it is made holy after it receives the Body of Christ.”

John Chrysostom
Homily 20 on II Corinthians, 3

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ “...On the night before he died, Jesus instituted the Eucharist and at the same time established the priesthood of the New Covenant. He is priest, victim and altar: the mediator between God the Father and his people (cf. Heb 5:5-10), the victim of atonement (cf. 1 Jn 2:2, 4:10) who offers himself on the altar of the Cross.

Sacramentum caritatis, n°. 23

☩ “...The altar of the New Covenant is the Lord’s Cross, from which the sacraments of the Paschal mystery flow. On the altar, which is the center of the church, the sacrifice of the Cross

is made present under sacramental signs. the altar is also the table of the Lord, to which the People of God are invited.⁶⁰ In certain Eastern liturgies, the altar is also the symbol of the tomb (Christ truly died and is truly risen).

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 1182

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

By the oblation of his Body,
he brought the sacrifices of old to fulfillment
in the reality of the Cross
and, by commanding himself to you for our
salvation,
showed himself the Priest, the Altar, and the
Lamb of sacrifice.

Preface V of Easter

“May the light of Christ shine upon the table of
this altar, and may those who share the Lord’s
supper shine with his light.”

Order of the Dedication of a Church

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does the altar in your church represent the various meanings ascribed to it by our tradition?
2. What can you do to deepen the reverence you have for the altar?
3. What connection do you make between the altar in church and the altar of your heart?

FOR FURTHER READING

Romano Guardini, *Sacred Signs* (St. Louis, MO: Pio Decimo Press, 1956).

Duncan Stroik, *The Church Building as a Sacred Place: Beauty, Transcendence and the Eternal* (Mundelein, IL: Hillenbrand Books, 2012).



Episode 27: My Sacrifice and Yours

SUMMARY

At the end of the Preparation of the Offerings, the priest says to the people: "Pray, brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours (*meum ac vestrum sacrificium*) may be acceptable to God the Almighty Father." There are not two sacrifices. Rather, we share in the singular sacrifice of Christ, each in a unique way.

The *Roman Missal* makes clear that the people offer the sacrifice together with the priest. The people participation in the offering is sacramentalized by the offertory procession in which the people present not only bread and wine, but what these gifts symbolize: the offering of themselves. The priest then takes these gifts to the altar and presents them to God at the place of total self-giving, the altar of sacrifice. The gift of the people is joined to that of the priest and together joined to the eternal offering of Christ, thus highlighting the common priesthood of the Faithful, who are enabled by virtue of baptism to offer prayer and sacrifice.

This offering of priest and people occurs first and fundamentally in the heart. It is the total giving of oneself to God in union with Christ.

Roman Missal

In the celebration of Mass the faithful form a holy people, a people of God's own possession and a royal Priesthood, so that they may give thanks to God and offer the unblemished sacrificial Victim not only by means of the hands of the Priest but also together with him and so that they may learn to offer their very selves.

General Instruction, n°. 95

It is desirable that the participation of the faithful be expressed by an offering, whether of bread and wine for the celebration of the Eucharist or of other gifts to relieve the needs of the Church and of the poor.

General Instruction, n°. 140

Virgil Michel, osb.

"The externals of the liturgy are there to express and reveal the internal, they are the visible embodiment of the divine powers exercised in all liturgical functions, the visible expression of the sentiments uniting the members of the mystical body of Christ among themselves and with their Head."

IN THE TRADITION

“With contrite heart and humble spirit
let us be received;
As though it were burnt offerings of rams
and bulls,
or tens of thousands of fat lambs,
So let our sacrifice be in your presence today
and find favor before you...”

Daniel 3:39-40

“I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.”

Romans 12:1

“... all spiritual and mature Christians know that they are a royal race and are sharers in the office of the priesthood. For what is more king-like than to find yourself ruler over your body after having surrendered your soul to God? And what is more priestly than to promise the Lord a pure conscience and to offer him in love unblemished victims on the altar of one's heart?”

Pope Leo the Great
Sermon 4

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ “...The only perfect sacrifice is the one that Christ offered on the cross as a total offering to the Father's love and for our salvation. By uniting ourselves with his sacrifice we can make our lives a sacrifice to God.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 2100

☩ “With docile hearts, then, let all Christians hearken to the voice of their Common Father, who would have them, each and every one, intimately united with him as they approach the altar of God, professing the same faith,

obedient to the same law, sharing in the same Sacrifice with a single intention and one sole desire.”

Pius XII
Mediator Dei, 12

☩ “... all the faithful should be aware that to participate in the Eucharistic sacrifice is their chief duty and supreme dignity, and that not in an inert and negligent fashion, giving way to distractions and day-dreaming, but with such earnestness and concentration that they may be united as closely as possible with the High Priest [...] And together with Him and through Him let them make their oblation, and in union with Him let them offer up themselves.”

Pius XII
Mediator Dei, 80

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Sanctify graciously these gifts, O Lord, we pray, and, accepting the oblation of this spiritual sacrifice, make of us an eternal offering to you.

Prayer over the Offerings, Saturday of the Second Week of Easter

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How conscious are you of offering yourself totally to God?
2. Why is the Lord's sacrifice the “perfect sacrifice”?

FOR FURTHER READING

Virgil Michel, *The Liturgy of the Church according to the Roman Rite*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937).



Episode 28: The Mystery of Faith

SUMMARY

During Mass, immediately after the consecration of the Bread and Wine, the priest, with the Eucharist on the altar in front of him says, “The mystery of faith.” Why is this done? What does it mean?

Mysterium fidei was at one time translated as “Let us proclaim the mystery of faith.” And yet, the Latin text does not mean that we should “do” anything. It is simply a statement of fact, a statement about what is present before the priest on the altar.

In order to understand this, we must consider closely the directions given by the *Roman Missal*. The priest says his part, then remains silent. The people, the *Missal* says, *continue* by acclaiming one of the formulas. Why does the priest not join the people? To appreciate this, we must understand that the meaning of the root word of mystery, “*muo*,” literally means “to shut the mouth.” “*Muo*” is also the root word of the English cognate “mute.” It carries with it the nuance of being dumbfounded. Mystery, then, has the notion of being silent or being rendered speechless when confronted by the awesome majesty of God.

Imagine yourself at Mass, the consecration has just occurred. The priest stands from his genuflection. And it is as if he recognizes that before him, on the altar is the Body and Blood of Christ! The mystery of faith! And being so overwhelmed by this miracle, he is rendered speechless. The people rush to his help and conclude the acclamation.

This is a marvelous combination of people and priest working together in celebration of the Mass. It is a perfect example of how a deeper understanding of the different parts of the Mass can lead to a fuller and more intelligent participation. This deeper internal participation nurtures the spiritual life of both priest and people.

Roman Missal

After the Consecration when the Priest has said, The mystery of faith, the people pronounce the acclamation, using one of the prescribed formulas.

General Instruction, n°. 151

Then [the priest] says “The mystery of faith.” And the people continue, acclaiming...

Order of Mass, n°. 112

Prosper Guéranger, osb.

“Yea, verily, we are indeed offering something very great, for we have here before us the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. We call to mind His Passion which has been so blessed a boon for us; here too the Victim is immolated; but more than that, the Victim which we here possess as ours, is also He who rose again.”

IN THE TRADITION

“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.”

I Corinthians 11:23-26

“The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ’s faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. They should be instructed by God’s word and be nourished at the table of the Lord’s body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn also to offer themselves; through Christ the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all.”

Sacrosanctum concilium, n°. 48

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ “The mystery of the most Holy Eucharist which Christ, the High Priest instituted, and which He commands to be continually renewed in the Church by His ministers, is the culmination and center, as it were, of the Christian religion.”

Pius XII
Mediator Dei, 66

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

We proclaim your Death, O Lord,
and profess your Resurrection
until you come again.

When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup,
we proclaim your Death, O Lord,
until you come again.

Save us, Savior of the world,
for by your Cross and Resurrection
you have set us free.

Eucharistic Prayer, Order of Mass

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How conscious are you of the awesome mystery on the altar after the consecration?
2. How can we deepen our appreciation of the Real Presence of Christ?

FOR FURTHER READING

Prosper Gueranger, *On the Holy Mass*,
(Farnsborough, UK: St. Michael’s Abbey
Press, 2006).



Episode 29: Bow before Holy Communion

SUMMARY

People often ask, “What is the proper gesture before receiving Holy Communion?” The answer is actually very clear and simple. It can be found in the General Instruction of *The Roman Missal* at paragraph 160. The communicant makes a bow of the head before receiving the Body of the Lord and before receiving the Precious Blood.

This causes difficulty for some people because one might consider that a more proper, a more appropriate gesture or even a more reverent gesture would be a genuflection. That may indeed be true: a genuflection *can be* a beautiful sign of reverence. On the other hand, that is not what the Church has asked us to do.

Instead, the Church has chosen a gesture that everyone is *able to do*. This is based on the Church’s understanding that in the celebration of Mass, we should manifest in our bodies the great unity that we share in Christ: we are members of his body.

Earlier in the General Instruction the rubrics are explicit in stating that the people should show their unity with one another and avoid any appearance of division. A previous

translation of this text was even stronger saying the people were to “shun (*vitent*) any appearance of individualism or division.”

This gesture of a simple bow was chosen by the Bishops as the sign of reverence precisely because it allows everyone to manifest their unity at the time of Communion.

A bow could be more reverent, but in this instance of preparation for Holy Communion, the Church herself decides what we are to do. Let us follow the prescribed gesture, the bow of the head, in obedience to the Church. What’s more, make the bow of the head *mean a genuflection in your heart*. God will see your reverence and your neighbor will see your obedience.

The Roman Missal

When receiving Holy Communion, the communicant bows his or her head before the Sacrament as a gesture of reverence and receives the Body of the Lord from the minister. The consecrated host may be received either on the tongue or in the hand, at the discretion of each communicant. When Holy Communion is received under both kinds, the sign of reverence

is also made before receiving the Precious Blood.

General Instruction, n°. 160

In the celebration of Mass the faithful form a holy people, a people of God's own possession and a royal Priesthood, so that they may give thanks to God and offer the unblemished sacrificial Victim not only by means of the hands of the Priest but also together with him and so that they may learn to offer their very selves. They should, moreover, take care to show this by their deep religious sense and their charity toward brothers and sisters who participate with them in the same celebration.

They are consequently to avoid any appearance of singularity or division, keeping in mind that they have only one Father in heaven and that hence are all brothers or sisters one to the other.

General Instruction, n°. 95

IN THE TRADITION

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Galatians 3:28

"Christ is the bread of those who are in union with His body ... And therefore we ask that our bread—that is, Christ—may be given to us daily, that we who abide and live in Christ may not depart from His sanctification and body."

Saint Cyprian

On the Lord's Prayer (18)

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ "Since through baptism 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor freeman, male nor female,' but all are one in Christ Jesus, the assembly

which most fully portrays the nature of the Church and its role in the Eucharist is that which gathers together the faithful, men and women, of every age and walk of life.

The unity of this community, having its origin in the one bread in which all share, is arranged in hierarchical order. For this reason it is necessary that "each person, performing his role as a minister or as one of the faithful, should do all that the nature of the action and the liturgical norms require of him, and only that."

Eucharisticum Mysterium, n°. 16

☩ "To promote active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and songs, as well as by actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes. And at the proper times all should observe a reverent silence."

Sacrosanctum Concilium, n°. 30

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

O come, let us worship God
and bow low before the God who made us,
for he is the Lord our God.

Entrance Antiphon
Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The words of Jesus often focus on what is in one's heart. What are some of your favorite passages?
2. How can obedience to the Church's liturgical law be a spiritual exercise?

FOR FURTHER READING

Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Eucharisticum Mysterium: Instruction on Eucharistic Worship*, May 25, 1967.



Episode 30: The Liturgical Movement

SUMMARY

In essence, the liturgical movement is the effort on the part of the Church to help the faithful participate better at Mass. This meant, initially, that the people would participate in the singing and in giving the responses. Over the course of time, the Church realized that it is important that the people be able to enter deeply into the mystery by understanding what's going on during Mass. This means especially that they consciously participate in the offering. The liturgical movement helped to foster this kind of participation.

In the 1920s, a Benedictine monk, Virgil Michel, returned to America from his studies in Europe with some magnificent insights about the richness of the liturgy and the ability of the faithful to participate. One of the fundamental ideas he shared with the American Church was that prayer in the church must be connected with action in the world. With Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, Virgil Michel showed Catholics how prayer and concern for the poor should be woven together. Pope Pius XII echoes this notion in *Mediator Dei* when he insists, "it is

fitting that the mind believes what the lips sing, and that what the mind believes should be practiced in public and private life." (n°. 153) The liturgical movement is indeed a movement—but it is not fundamentally about changing the liturgy, rather the liturgy is intended to change us: to make us more aware, more receptive to the treasures of the Church's public prayer. "The Liturgical Movement, therefore, as the words indicate, is a *movement*—a movement towards the *liturgy*." It is the effort to bring the people themselves closer to the liturgy, to understand it more fully, to enter into it more deeply, and to participate and benefit from it more completely. The Liturgical Movement is the effort to help the people participate better in the Mass: fully, consciously, and actively.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

Zeal for the promotion and restoration of the liturgy is rightly held to be a sign of the providential dispositions of God in our time, as a movement of the Holy Spirit in His Church... (n°. 43)

But in order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds should be attuned to their voices, and that they should cooperate with divine grace lest they receive it in vain. (n°. 11)

IN THE TRADITION

“Song befits the lover.”

Saint Augustine
Sermon 336, 1.

“See how we were bought: Christ hangs upon the cross, see at what a price He makes His purchase . . . He sheds His blood, He buys with His blood, He buys with the blood of the Spotless Lamb, He buys with the blood of God’s only Son. He who buys is Christ; the price is His blood; the possession bought is the world.”

Saint Augustine
Commentary on Psalm 147

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ “We are with a most ardent desire to see the true Christian spirit flourish [...] the faithful assemble for no other object than that of acquiring this spirit from its foremost and indispensable font, which is the active participation in the most holy mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church.”

Pope Saint Pius X
Tra le sollecitudini

☩ “A remarkably widespread revival of scholarly interest in the sacred liturgy took place towards the end of the last century and has continued through the early years of this one. The movement owed its rise to commendable private initiative and more particularly to the

zealous and persistent labor of several monasteries within the distinguished Order of Saint Benedict.”

Pope Pius XII
Mediator Dei, 4

☩ “It should be clear to all, then, that God cannot be honored worthily unless the mind and heart turn to Him in quest of the perfect life, and that the worship rendered to God by the Church in union with her divine Head is the most efficacious means of achieving sanctity.”

Pope Pius XII
Mediator Dei, 26

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Grant us, O Lord, we pray,
that we may participate worthily
in these mysteries,
for whenever the memorial
of this sacrifice is celebrated
the work of our redemption is accomplished.

Prayer over the Offerings, Holy Thursday

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does a better understanding of the Mass help you to participate more fully?
2. How can careful attention to prayer at Mass help us to engage mind and heart?

FOR FURTHER READING

Virgil Michel, osb, *The Liturgy of the Church*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1937).

Lambert Beaudin, osb, *Liturgy: the Life of the Church*, (Farnsborough: Saint Michaels Abbey Press, 2002).



Episode 31: The Dismissal

SUMMARY

We might consider that the words of the dismissal are the three (*Ite, missa est*) most forgotten words of the entire Mass. The Latin word, “*Ite*” is the imperative of “go”. This is an emphatic, insistent Go! “*Ite, missa est*” literally means “Go, it is sent.”

Mass was originally a series of dismissals: the dismissal of those in the Order of Penitents, the dismissal of those in the Order of Catechumen, and finally, at the end of Mass, the dismissal of the members of the community of the Faithful. The Church herself teaches what we are to do at the dismissal of the Mass: we must return to doing good works, and praising and blessing God.

The new edition of the Roman Missal provides four options for the dismissal: 1) Go forth, the Mass is ended; 2) Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord; 3) Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life; 4) Go in peace.

The second and third dismissals were added to the Roman Missal by Pope Benedict XVI in response to the 2008 Synod on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church.

The Holy Father added these biblical dismissals

so that the connection between liturgy and daily life would be more evident. The first of these comes from the story of the healing of the demoniac in the Gospel of Saint Mark. The other comes from the fifth chapter of Saint Luke which describes the healing of the paralytic. He went home glorifying God! We are reminded at the conclusion of every Mass that the mission of the Catholic Faithful is precisely to bring the message of the Gospel to their families, to their neighborhoods and to the workplace.

Roman Missal

To the Concluding Rites belong the following...

c) the Dismissal of the people by the Deacon or the Priest, so that each may go back to doing good works, praising and blessing God.

General Instruction, n°. 90.

The celebration of Mass, as the action of Christ and of the People of God arrayed hierarchically, is the center of the whole of Christian life for the Church both universal and local, as well as for each of the faithful individually. For in it is

found the high point both of the action by which God sanctifies the world in Christ and of the worship that the human race offers to the Father, adoring him through Christ, the Son of God, in the Holy Spirit.

General Instruction, n°. 16.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

[T]he liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows. For the aim and object of apostolic works is that all who are made sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of His Church, to take part in the sacrifice, and to eat the Lord's supper. (n°. 10)

IN THE TRADITION

"Go home to your family and announce to them all that the Lord in his pity has done for you." Then the man went off and began to proclaim in the Decapolis what Jesus had done for him; and all were amazed.

Mark 5: 19-20

"He stood up immediately before them, picked up what he had been lying on, and went home, glorifying God. Then astonishment seized them all and they glorified God, and, struck with awe, they said, "We have seen incredible things today."

Luke 5: 25-26

"What does [Jesus] finally say to them when he sees them? ... 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.' Having put into their hands a summary of Christian teaching he commands them to go out into the whole world."

Saint John Chrysostom
Homily on the Gospel of Matthew, 90.2

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

☩ "[The] faithful ... carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world. ... They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity.

Lumen Gentium, 31

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Go forth, the Mass is ended.
Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.
Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.
Go in peace.

Order of Mass

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How would you describe the relationship between liturgy and life?
2. What other parts of the Mass point to the Christian's mission in the world?

FOR FURTHER READING

Pope Benedict XVI, *The Word of the Lord: Verbum Domini: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation*, (Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing, 2001).