

Liturgy & Sacraments



The Public Worship of the Church
&
The Channels of God's Grace

What is Liturgy?



- The liturgy is the public worship of the Church and the context within which all of the sacraments are meant to take place.
 - Often, you will hear the “liturgy” or the “sacred liturgy” refer to the Mass, which is correct, but it refers to all the public worship of the Church
 - Another definition: Liturgy is the ritualized public divine worship in the Church
 - They are public in that they are the action of the entire Church – not just the priest, not just the gathered assembly, but the entire Mystical Body of Christ
- In addition to the sacramental liturgies, other examples include:
 - Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament
 - Liturgy of the Hours (Divine Office)
 - Formal blessings, etc.

What is Liturgy?



- Liturgy, in general, has a primary end and a secondary end
 - Primary - the worship and adoration of God
 - Secondary - the sanctification of the people (to get us to heaven)
- There are other good and desired effects, (e.g. forming a community, deepening our fraternal ties, etc.) but let's not forget the real reason for our liturgies...
 - The temptation is always there to forget that...but when we do, worship ceases, the community collapses in on itself, and we end up exalting and celebrating ourselves
 - So we strive to keep everything focused on the worship of God. The other good things will happen if we get this right!

Always and everywhere the same



- It is the public worship of the Church as a whole and as such is unchanging in its *essentials* and fixed by certain norms of practice called “rubrics.”
- The rubrics indicate how the liturgy is to be done.
 - Many of these rubrics come down from remote antiquity (i.e., the Apostles) and are intimately connected with the validity of the sacraments themselves.
 - This is why you can go to any Mass or other liturgy anywhere in the world and it will be carried out essentially the same
 - The rubrics are established by the Church and not by the priest. The priest has no authority to add, subtract or modify any of the essential parts of the liturgy

The Liturgy is a Work of Jesus Christ



In the Catholic liturgy, Christ himself is present and performs the liturgical action.

- Every act of liturgical worship, therefore, is not only directed towards God as an act of adoration but is a work of God with regards to the faithful.
 - In a sense, the liturgy is not our work (what can we do?), it is a work of God on our behalf
- By virtue of his sacred ordination, the priest is particularly conformed to Christ and acts in the person of Christ the head.
- Therefore, in the liturgy, it is Christ acting and Christ worshiping and praying to his Heavenly Father through the person of the priest on behalf of the people, his body.

The Liturgy is a Work of Jesus Christ



The liturgy is a divine action where:

- God and man meet
 - Every Sacrament is the work of God for the sanctification of the soul
- Where the temporal nature of this world is transcended
 - “Lift up your hearts...”
- Where we adore God in union with the angels and saints, with whom we are in communion.
 - An action of the entire Church

The Liturgy is a Work of Jesus Christ



- So again, it is because of the divine nature of the liturgy that liturgical worship is not subject to the spirit and creativity of the times.
- Not even the Church has the authority to change the essential elements of the liturgy and the sacraments.
 - NB – *non-essential* elements can and do change from place to place and from time to time
- It is not the private action of any one priest or congregation but belongs to the Church Universal.
- From the beginning, the Church saw its liturgy as a participation in the heavenly worship of God.
- The core of the liturgy has remained unchanged since apostolic times, though the externals have developed since then in a slow and organic manner.

The earliest description of the Mass



- On the day which is called the “Day of the Sun” (*Sunday*) a reunion is made of all those who dwell in the cities and fields; and the commentaries of the Apostles and writings of the Prophets are read as long as time allows. (*Liturgy of the Word*)
- Then, when the reader has done, the priest admonishes us in a speech and excites us to copy these glorious things. (*Homily*)
- Then we all rise and say prayers in common for ourselves, and for those who have been enlightened, and for all who are everywhere. (*Prayers of the Faithful*)
- We greet each other with a kiss when the prayers are finished. (*Sign of Peace*)
- Then bread and a cup of water and wine are brought to the priest (*Offertory*)

The earliest description of the Mass



- And he having received them sends up praise and glory to the Father of all through the name of his Son and the Holy Spirit (*Prayer over the Gifts*)
- And makes a long thanksgiving that we have been made worthy of these things by him (*Eucharistic Prayer*).
- When these prayers and thanksgivings are ended all the people present cry “Amen.” (*the ‘Great Amen’*)
- And when the priest has given thanks and all the people have answered, those whom we call deacons give the bread and wine and water for which the thanksgiving has been made to be tasted by those who are present, and they carry them to those that are absent. This food is called by us the Eucharist.
- Written by St. Justin Martyr, about the year 150 A.D.

Liturgy



- Because of Christ's abiding presence in the Church, the rituals of the Church become efficacious.
 - i.e., it is not because of us that the rituals “work” but because of Christ
- They not only symbolize heavenly realities, but also make those realities present.
 - In Israel circumcision represented a cutting away of sin.
 - Christian baptism, however, not only symbolizes the washing away of sin, but actually accomplishes this by the very performance of the act.

What are Sacraments?



- The word sacrament corresponds to the Greek word *mysterium*, which denotes the unknowable depths of God. The sacraments are still sometimes referred to as “mysteries.”
- Some basic definitions. A sacrament is...
 - A transcendent reality made manifest in history
 - An efficacious sign of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which the divine life is dispensed to us through the work of the Holy Spirit
 - A divine bestowal of salvific grace in an outwardly perceptible form, which makes that bestowal manifest and visible in time.
 - **Visible signs and actions, instituted by Christ, through which God imparts invisible grace for our salvation**

What are Sacraments?



- There are three elements in the concept of a sacrament:
 - The external, sensibly perceptible sign – the ‘sacramental sign’ (i.e., what you can see, hear, feel, taste or smell)
 - The actual conferring of grace (the internal, invisible element)
 - Its institution by Christ (i.e., the Church didn’t just make them up)

Matter and Form



- A sacramental sign has two parts; matter and form
- The matter consists of what is perceptible to the senses, and is either a physical substance (water, oil, bread, wine) or a perceptible action (spoken marriage vows, water poured on the head, etc.)
- The matter can be thought of as the “stuff” of the sacrament; whatever is perceptible to the senses is the matter.
 - In Baptism, the matter is water.
 - In Penance, it is the audibly expressed confession of sins and contrition of the penitent.

Matter & Form



- On the other hand, the form (Latin: *formula*) refers to the words that are spoken in prayer and the way in which the action is carried out.
 - Example: In Confirmation, the form is “John, be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit,” as the person is anointed on the head with chrism oil (matter).
- The Church teaches that if either matter or form is lacking there is no true sacrament.
- Rules concerning matter and form must be rigidly followed

Validity & Invalidity



- To say a sacrament is valid is to say that it has truly and really been brought about, that the graces of that sacrament on the soul have been objectively imparted.
 - NB – the grace of the Sacrament is imparted regardless of what the recipient may feel. Emotion or sensibly perceptible effects are not expected, nor should they be sought for their own sakes. Sometimes they do happen, and we accept them with gratitude as moments of grace and consolation from God.
 - Remember that the primary effect of the Sacraments is on the soul
 - They concern our sanctification before God

Validity & Invalidity



- Besides matter and form, a valid sacrament needs two additional elements:
 - a validly ordained minister
 - and the intent to administer the sacrament
- Invalidity can therefore be brought about in several ways:
 - defect of form (wrong words or actions)
 - defect of matter (wrong “stuff”)
 - lack of the properly ordained minister (no one with the power to confer the sacraments)
 - lack of intent (not intending to carry it out).

The Conferring of Grace



- The sacraments are called “means of grace” because they act as channels through which the grace of God is mediated to us.
- The Sacraments actually bring about what they symbolize
 - This is essentially different than our normal understanding of a sign or symbol
 - For example: the flag, a wedding ring, a crucifix
 - Sacraments are different – again, they actually bring about what they symbolize...

Channels of Grace



- Water is a symbol of cleansing
 - In the baptismal liturgy, the Sacrament of Baptism uses water and actually brings about the cleansing of original and actual sin
- Anointing with oil is a traditional method of healing
 - The Church takes that traditional element, and through the sacramental liturgy actually brings about the healing grace of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick (See James 5)
- Bread and Wine are symbols of food and drink, and actually are food and drink
 - Jesus took them and instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. In the Sacrament of the Eucharist, we actually are fed with the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, receiving all the graces of that Sacrament. (See John 6)

Christ is the Actor



- Christ is the one at work in the Sacraments – the graces of the Sacraments come from him
 - *“It is Christ who baptizes, he who similarly acts in his sacraments to communicate the grace that each one signifies.” CCC 1127*
- Important!!
 - The Sacraments are NOT magic, by which the “gods” or the “spirits” are manipulated through ritual gestures or sacrifices and somehow “compelled” to act or not act.
 - We do not (and can not) compel God to do anything. He remains completely free
 - God can not be manipulated or fooled

Do this in memory of me...



- The Sacraments represent the Church obeying God's command as it relates to the sanctification of his people and carrying on the ministry and mission of Christ entrusted to it.
- In other words, Christ told us to do these things - He instituted the Sacraments - in order to impart his grace upon his people and save them
 - We did not make them up
 - We do not control or force God to act
 - We are simply obeying what Jesus told us to do and in the way he told us to do it

Do this in memory of me...



- By analogy, this is similar to our discussion of the OT sacrificial rituals
 - God said to sacrifice an animal, of a certain type, in a certain way, on a certain day, by a certain person – and if they did that, then God promised that he would act in a certain way
 - In the same way, Jesus said to baptize “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”
 - After consecrating the bread and wine at the Last Supper, Jesus said, “do this in memory of me...”

Do this in memory of me...



- All of the Sacraments represent the Church fulfilling the command of the Lord to impart his grace and a share in his own divine life to all, and to carry that out by specific channels, with specific form, with specific matter and by a specific person with a specific intent.
- Those channels of grace we call the Sacraments...

The Seven Sacraments



- Sacraments of Initiation
 - Baptism
 - Confirmation
 - Holy Eucharist
- Sacraments of Healing
 - Reconciliation (Confession, Penance)
 - Anointing of the Sick (Extreme Unction)
- Sacraments of Vocation/Service
 - Matrimony
 - Holy Orders

Ex Opere Operato



- Latin phrase meaning “by the very nature of the work.”
 - This means that the grace of the Sacrament is imparted regardless of the holiness of the person administering it.
- The worthiness or unworthiness of the minister does not affect the validity of the sacrament
 - Why is this? Because, although he acts through the person of the ordained minister, it is Christ who is the “actor” at work in the Sacraments – the grace comes from him and not from the minister
- The sacraments are efficacious (i.e. they “work”) by the very nature of their being performed with the proper matter, form, minister and intent.

Ex Opere Operantis



- This concept refers to how much grace a person is subjectively disposed to receiving.
- We receive more or less grace from the Sacraments according to our disposition. (i.e. how open are we to advancing in holiness, to deeper conversion, to discerning and obeying the divine will, to rejecting sin and drawing closer to Christ)
 - The more we are disposed to receive grace, the more we will receive
 - “To the one who has, more will be given. From the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” (Mt 13:12)

Ex Opere Operantis



- When a person is in mortal sin, he or she does not receive any grace from the Sacraments (except from Confession, of course).
- Therefore, we cannot be tempted to view the Sacraments as mechanical rituals that will sanctify us against our will.
- We must strive to grow in holiness so that we can receive more of the grace that Christ offers us through the Sacraments.

God is not Bound by the Sacraments



- The Sacraments are the normative, regular means for Catholics to encounter Christ
- But, God does not restrict his grace to the channels of the Sacraments exclusively. The Church is “bound” by the Sacraments – God is not.
 - Peter Lombard (c. 1160) said that, “God did not bind his own power by the Sacraments”
 - St. Thomas Aquinas said: “It belongs to the excellence of Christ’s power, that he could bestow the sacramental effect without conferring the exterior Sacrament.”
- God is able to affect the grace of the Sacraments in a person’s soul without the exterior sign of the Sacrament.
 - Remember, God is free and can do as it pleaseth him to do

God is not Bound by the Sacraments



- But don't be presumptuous
 - The Sacraments are God's gifts to us, the ordinary means of obtaining his grace and help and a share of his divine life
 - Let's not fall into the temptation of thinking that God will just give us the graces of the Sacraments without receiving the Sacraments that he himself instituted specifically to impart those graces.
- But at the same time...
 - This gives us hope for those who are away from the Lord. He is not bound by his Sacraments.
 - We should always pray for others for God's grace and mercy upon them (and ourselves).

Next week...



- Next Class – December 14
- Baptism and Confirmation

- Bible study: The Book of Revelation this Wed, Dec 9

- Sources: NABRE, Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), *Catholic Christianity* by Peter J. Kreeft, unamsanctamcatolicam.org



- Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit
- R./ As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.