

In Communion with Christ

1. Introduction

With the passing of time, in the light of the fruits that it has brought, one sees ever more clearly the importance of ‘Sacrosanctum Concilium.’ In it are luminously delineated the principles that are the foundation of the liturgical praxis of the Church, and they inspire healthy renewal in the course of time. The Liturgy was placed by the conciliar Fathers in the context of the history of salvation, whose end is human redemption and the perfect glorification of God. The redemption has its prelude in the wonderful divine gesture of the Old Testament and was brought to fulfilment by Christ the Lord, especially through the paschal mystery of his blessed passion, death, resurrection and glorious ascension. Yet it has need not only of being proclaimed but lived, and it is this that happens ‘through the Sacrifice and the Sacraments, on which the whole of liturgical life is based.’ Christ renders himself present in a special way in liturgical actions, associating the Church to himself. Every liturgical celebration is, therefore, the work of Christ the Priest and of his Mystical Body, ‘integral public worship,’ in which one participates, as a foretaste of the Liturgy of the heavenly Jerusalem. Because of this, ‘the Liturgy is the summit toward which the action of the Church tends and, at the same time, the source from which all its virtue emanates.’

With forty years of hindsight, it is opportune to assess progress to date. Already on other occasions, I have suggested a type of examination of conscience in regard to the reception of the Second Vatican Council. Such an examination cannot disregard the liturgical-sacramental life. ‘Is the Liturgy lived as ‘source and summit’ of ecclesial life, according to the teaching of ‘Sacrosanctum Concilium’?’ Has the rediscovery of the value of the Word of God, which the liturgical reform has brought about, found a positive affirmation in our celebrations? To what degree has the Liturgy entered the concrete living of the faithful and to what degree does it reflect the rhythm of the individual communities? Is it understood as a means of holiness, as an inner force of apostolic dynamism and ecclesial mission?

The conciliar renewal of the Liturgy has its most evident expression in the publication of the liturgical books. After an initial period in which there was a gradual insertion of renewed texts within liturgical celebrations, it became necessary to go more profoundly into the riches and potential that they represent. Such profundity must exercise the

Perhaps the most serious lesson to be learned from these last several decades is the almost total lack of thoughtful and sustained catechesis on the liturgy. My suspicion is that too much was presumed of a liturgy in the vernacular. Once the liturgy was in our own language we would have no more need of teaching because each of us would understand it. Just a few words of explanation would suffice, or at least that appears, in hindsight, to have been the operative wisdom.

Now we know differently. To understand the words is not necessarily to understand what we are doing when we gather to give praise and thanks, express our sorrow, pledge our lives, beg for healing or participate in any of the other sacramental moments. I have friends who will admit privately that they don’t participate in the sacrament of reconciliation because they don’t know what to do or say. I know others who still talk about the ‘last rites’ – which is precisely what these rites are not. I know scores of people who do not think there is much difference between a celebration of the Eucharist or a service of word and communion when a priest is not available for Eucharist, yet these are *essentially* different events of prayer.

Kathleen Hughes.

Saying Amen: A Mystagogy of Sacrament.
Chicago: Liturgical Training Publications, 1999.

Key Texts

**General Instruction
of the Roman Missal**
16–45; 352–385

Celebrating the Mass
1–138

principle of total fidelity to Sacred Scripture and Tradition, authoritatively interpreted in particular by the Second Vatican Council, whose teachings were confirmed and developed in the subsequent Magisterium.

In this perspective it is more necessary than ever to promote the liturgical life within our communities, through an adequate formation of the ministers and of all the faithful, in view of that full, conscious and active participation in the liturgical celebrations envisioned by the Council.

The duty of Pastors is indispensable, in education in prayer and in particular in the promotion of the liturgical life. It implies a duty of discernment and guidance. These is not perceived as a principle of rigidity, as opposed to the need of the Christian spirit to abandon itself to the action of the Spirit of God, who intercedes in us and 'for us with sighs too deep for words' (Romans 8:26). Rather, through the guidance of Pastors, a principle of 'guarantee' is realized, foreseen in the design of God for the Church, being governed by the assistance of the Holy Spirit. The liturgical renewal realized in these decades has demonstrated how it is possible to combine a norm that ensures the Liturgy its identity and its decorum, with room for creativity and adaptation, which render it close to the expressive needs of the various regions, situations and cultures. By not respecting the liturgical norm, one arrives at times at even serious abuses that put in shadow the truth of the mystery and create disturbance and tensions in the People of God. Such abuses have nothing to do with the authentic spirit of the Council and are to be corrected by Pastors with an attitude of prudent firmness.

In the life of the Church, the promulgation of the liturgical Constitution has marked a stage of fundamental importance for the promotion and the development of the Liturgy. The Church that, animated by the breath of the Spirit, lives its mission of 'sacrament, that is sign and instrument of the intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race,' finds in the Liturgy the highest expression of its mystery and reality.

In the Lord Jesus and in his Spirit the whole of Christian life becomes a 'living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,' authentic 'spiritual worship' (Romans 12:1). Great, indeed, is the mystery that is realized in the Liturgy. It opens to earth a glimpse of Heaven and the community of believers is raised, in harmony with the singing of the heavenly Jerusalem, the perennial hymn of praise: '*Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth. Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua. Hosanna in excelsis!*'

A 'liturgical spirituality' is developing at this beginning of the millennium, which makes one become aware of Christ as first 'liturgist,' who does not cease to act in the Church and in the world in the strength of the paschal mystery continually celebrated, and associates the Church in himself, in praise of the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

Teach me the ritual that runs beyond
The rote of words,
the flexing of the knee:
Let me be always, Lord of Life, with Thee!
In all my motions ready to respond
To Thy unveilings,
though in Scripture conned,
Or in the mid-night's insect melody,
The scent of bloom from desert bush
or tree,
The dawn's reflection in the blushing pond.
How shall I worship only for an hour?
How think Thee present
under dome and spire.
Or sense Thee in the wafer and the wine
Except the common bread and cup
are Thine,
Thine shop and street, the hearth-stone
and the fire,
Thine all the ministries of natural power?

Robert Whitaker (1863-1944)

Spiritus et Sponsa 2, 6-8, 15-16

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Starting points

What particular points struck you from your reading of GIRM and/or CTM; from the People's leaflets; or from the other reading material?

In what ways do these particular points challenge or affirm your present practice?

How do you prepare yourself for Sunday and your ministry?

What are the particular strengths of liturgical celebration in your parish?

What particular weaknesses are you aware of?

What are the main points you wish to continue to explore?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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Homily notes

How is the liturgy or worship represented or described in:

- today's readings and psalm?
- the Mass propers?
- the preface and Eucharistic Prayer?
- the Ordinary of the Mass?
- the music and songs chosen for use in the Mass?

What place does liturgy or other forms of ritual have in the daily life of your community? What is there to learn from this?

What are the major events in your parish/town at present?

What are the major national/international events at present?

What stories/experiences connect with the theme of liturgy and worship?

And what songs, plays, films, paintings etc.?

Main points to be carried forward into homily

1.

2.

3.