



## Essay Summary:

### Living a Eucharistic Life

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#### What We pray and What We Believe Shapes How We Live.

- Throughout the Church's history, the underlying dynamic of the Eucharist has remained the same: Christians gather to celebrate the Eucharist and are then sent forth to live what they have celebrated.
- The Eucharist has a unique and central role in the life of the Church.
- The Eucharist is a mystery to be *believed*, *celebrated* and *lived*.
- The Eucharist is *integral to* and *integrative of* the whole Christian life.
- The Eucharist is the central act of our salvation, and the means for our continuing personal and communal sanctification.
- The celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday is the central sacramental of the whole Church's life. To the old adage, *lex orandi, lex credendi* (What we pray is what we believe) is added a third phrase, *lex vivendi* (What we pray and believe is also the law of Christian living).
- The enactment of the Eucharist leads to the enactment in human life of the Word celebrated and the Eucharistic sacrifice perpetuated.

#### Liturgy, Prayer and Spirituality

- The relationship and connection between liturgy, prayer and spirituality can be shown diagrammatically as three concentric circles. The central circle would be *liturgy*, with the Eucharist as the primary focus. The second circle surrounding the first would be *prayer*, and the third, encompassing the other two, would be *spirituality*.
- The term 'liturgy' includes *all* the rites of the Church's public prayer, but the Eucharist is at the heart of liturgical prayer.
- Liturgy is always set within the context of other kinds of praying and living the spiritual life, but it is at

the *centre* because it is the privileged and unique means through which believers can participate in Christ's Death and Resurrection. Through the very act of the liturgy, we celebrate our dying and rising through, with and in him.

- The Church is the home of a variety of ways of praying and 'schools' of spirituality, but all of the faithful share the Eucharist in common. It is the Eucharist that is a necessary part of the Catholic, Christian life, since without the Eucharist we cannot exist as Catholics.
- Liturgy is the *public* prayer of the Church, but it is not the only form of praying. Our relationship with God and each other is nurtured by various kinds of prayer (meditation, devotions, adoration, *lectio divina* [a prayerful reading of the Scriptures], for example), but always with the liturgy at its centre.
- Spirituality encompasses nothing less than the entirety of the Christian life lived in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. We live the Christian life in the world as the Gospel's witnesses.
- Liturgy and prayer shape and form us to be who we are and what we are ever called to be: heralds of the Good News.
- Liturgy does not take us away from other prayer, nor does it take us away from the world in which we live our spiritual lives; liturgy is always set within the context of the wider community and in service to the wider world.
- Spirituality is a way of thinking and acting in the world, based on the Gospel. It always incorporates one into the communal, ecclesial search for God. It is leading the life of virtue in harmony with the Gospel and the Church's teachings and practices.
- A 'liturgical' spirituality is one that is shaped, nourished, fostered and deepened by the celebration of the liturgy.

## The Constitution on the Liturgy– Principles about Spirituality Derived from the Liturgy

### **Liturgy and Life/Liturgy in Life**

- 'The Liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fount from which all the Church's power flows' (SC, no. 10).

That is to say, liturgy and mission are to be integrated in such a way that they are seen to be parallel and complementary aspects of an integrated Christian life in which the liturgy is central and essential.

- 'The liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church. Before people can come to the liturgy they must be called to faith and to conversion. . . . To believers, also, the Church must ever preach faith and penance, prepare them for the sacraments, teach them to observe all that Christ has commanded (cf. Matthew 28:20), and invite them to all the works of charity, worship and the apostolate. . .' (SC, no. 9)
- Within the Liturgy of the Word both the baptised and candidates seeking entrance into the Catholic Church are called to ongoing conversion to Christ in the Church.
- Hearing the Word proclaimed moves the assembly to go beyond itself by naming and praying for those who are oppressed, in need, sick, dying or deceased in the Prayer of the Faithful. These prayers remind the Eucharistic assembly of the universality of the Church and the challenge to engage in communal self-transcendence.

- In the Procession of Gifts, foodstuffs to be shared with the community's poor may be brought up with the bread and wine. After we have shared the Body and Blood of the Lord in Communion, we are sent forth with food for the poor.
- Deacons, the same ones who announce the petitions of the Prayer of the Faithful, are also responsible for the distribution of food to the poor. Deacons can and should serve as a permanent reminder of the intrinsic relationship between liturgy and the rest of life, between serving God in the prayer of the liturgy and in the service of others in daily life.
- The celebration of the liturgy serves as a ritual reminder of the admonition to pray throughout the day.

### ***The Primacy of Liturgy and Other Kinds of Prayer***

- 'Popular devotions of the Christian people are to be highly endorsed, provided they accord with the laws and norms of the Church. . . . devotions should be so fashioned that they harmonize with the liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some way derived from it, and lead the people to it, since, in fact, the liturgy by its very nature far surpasses any of them'. (SC, no.13)

### ***Seven Theological Principles Underpinning the Revised Eucharistic Liturgy***

#### **1. Sacramentality**

All Catholic liturgy presumes the use of and reflection on the **things of the earth**:

- In Baptism we use water, the only element without which we cannot live;
- In the Eucharist we use bread and wine – the result of human manufacture from the things of this earth. Bread and wine sustain life and festivity. Consecrated bread and wine sustain us in the life of Christ granted in Baptism, a life which is hope- and joy-filled.
- We do not shun or leave the world when we worship God in liturgy, rather, we revere the earth and its produce and use things from this world to worship God.
- The intersection of the things of this earth with the things of God is an essential foundation for our understanding of what it means to use the things of this earth in the liturgy.

#### **2. Word**—Proclamation of **the Scriptures** is foundational to liturgy.

- One of the chief features of all liturgical rituals revised after the Second Vatican Council is that each of them has a Liturgy of the Word, since our faith has its roots in the revealed Word of God.
- The events of our salvation occur among us as the Word is proclaimed; in the Word proclaimed, Christ carries on the work of redemption.
- *Lectio divina* (a prayerful reading of the Scriptures) is thus very important, because it prepares us for the proclamation of the Word at Mass and continues to deepen within us the biblical literacy and familiarity which the liturgy presumes.
- Both the proclamation of the Word at Mass and *lectio divina* help the Scriptures to become second nature to us and be our companion on the journey of life.
- The liturgical year offers us a lens through which to read the Scriptures and gives us a context for interpretation.

- The Responsorial Psalm offers the community the opportunity to respond prayerfully to what has just been proclaimed.
- Knowledge of the Scriptures includes knowledge of the Psalter, which has always been a staple of worship in both Judaism and Christianity.
- To use the Psalter in our devotional prayer challenges us to deeper trust in God as well as encourages us when our faith is weak and we feel very distant from God.

### 3. **Paschal Mystery**—All liturgy is **paschal**.

- The liturgy is the Church's privileged means whereby believers participate in the Paschal Mystery of Christ.
- To name 'Christ our Lord' at the conclusion of the Church's liturgical prayers, therefore, is to invoke the resurrected Christ as our unique mediator with God, who never ceases to intercede for us at the right hand of the Father (cf. Rom 8:34; Heb 1:30). The conclusions of the prayers acknowledge that God the Father chose for his Son to redeem us through his humiliation, suffering, betrayal, dying and ultimate rising and ascending to his Father's right hand in glory. To speak the phrase 'Christ our Lord' is to use shorthand to cite how Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection unite us to the Father as the community of the saved, the redeemed.
- The *mystery of faith* (Memorial Acclamation) added to the Eucharistic Prayers after Vatican II helps underscore the paschal character of all liturgy:

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

- The liturgy's linking of death and resurrection, humiliation and glorification, betrayal and reconciliation, offers helpful models for personal prayer which might tend to emphasise one aspect of these profound realities in isolation or as distinct from each other. The resurrection offers us enduring hope and a totally new life; it is the hopeful lens through which we view and deal with our own weakness, sickness, terminal illness, humiliations and defeats in our daily life. They are transformed by our participation in Christ's saving Death and Resurrection.
- It is precisely in the celebration of the liturgy that the dying and rising of Christ intersects with our very human lives in need of redemption and sanctification. Nothing could be more consoling than to realise that it is through this celebration that *our* deaths and defeats in life have been overcome, and that from the Resurrection of Christ comes *our* real life.
- The Paschal Mystery of Christ is accomplished once and for all and yet is continually appropriated by the Church in the celebration of the liturgy.

### 4. **Trinity**—All liturgical prayer is **Trinitarian**.

- The Christian Church names God in every liturgy as 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit'. In other words, the *relational* aspect of the Triune God is emphasised ahead of any *functional* aspect (e.g., 'creator', 'redeemer', 'sanctifier'). Naming God in this relational way models the fact that we, as human persons, can and do have a relationship with God.
- The recounting of God's mighty and wonderful deeds for us has as its aim to draw us into the very

being of the three personed God, the Trinity.

- The Eucharistic Prayers at Mass begin by addressing God the Father, and many almost immediately invoke Jesus as our mediator with the Father. The Final Doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer acclaims that it is *through Christ (Through him, and with him, and in him...)* in the unity of the Holy Spirit that the Church has the possibility and privilege of addressing and thanking God the Father for all his mighty deeds of salvation as they are experienced anew at the Eucharist itself.
- Naming the Trinity as three persons is a continual reminder that the triune God is a mystery to be pondered and appropriated. While the privileged place to do this is at the liturgy, it should also be part of other kinds of prayer.
- The richness of 'God language' found in liturgical texts might well encourage our personal prayer to be similar, in order to sustain in our personal prayer the same dynamic at work in the liturgy.

## 5. Church—We experience God as a **community of believers**.

- 99% of the pronouns that the Church uses in our liturgy to name who we are and our need for God are in the plural: 'we', 'our', and 'us'.
- Essentially, all liturgy is about the enactment of the Paschal Mystery in and among *the community that is the Church*. God invites and we respond.
- We who are nourished at the altar are to be members of a community that assumes its proper responsibility to engage in mission and action outside the Eucharist.
- In Eucharistic Prayer III we ask: *Be pleased to confirm in faith and charity your pilgrim Church on earth*. Before we are called from this life to the next we are the *imperfect, pilgrim* Church on earth. We who are the Church of Christ on earth must strive to become the *less imperfect* Church by being re-shaped and re-formed in God's image and likeness through the Eucharist and other acts of the Sacred Liturgy.
- One of the main purposes of the Eucharist is to build up the Church, but no celebration of the liturgy is ever only about itself or closed in on itself. It is always about the wider, universal Church, and the Church being the *sacrament of salvation* for the whole world.
- In every Eucharist there are two places in particular where the local assembly prays with and for the universal Church:
  - a) when the Pope and Bishop are named in the Eucharistic Prayer (not as individuals, but as shepherds of the universal Church and the local Church.)
  - b) in the Prayer of the Faithful (Universal Prayer), where the faithful exercise the office of their baptismal priesthood by praying for the salvation of all.
- We, who are the Body of Christ on earth, celebrate the Eucharist to receive the Body of Christ in this Sacrament in order that we might be the more perfect reflection of God as the Church in the world.
- The use of such phrases as *we offer, we humbly pray, we ask you to accept and bless*, shows that the entire gathered assembly joins the Priest in celebrating the liturgy and in offering this act of praise to the Father. In no way is the assembly *passive*. In fact, the liturgy is a celebration of thanks and praise by the baptismal priesthood and ordained priesthood for God's gifts of redemption and salvation.

- The foundation on which the liturgy is based is the communal, covenantal relationship which the particular, gathered assembly enjoys with God and the entire Church (universal, diocesan, parochial). As a member of the assembly I am challenged not to put *myself* first and foremost, but the community to which I belong.
- As Church, we are always part of something bigger than we are as individuals. The very gathering of the assembly to celebrate baptisms, weddings, funerals, anointing of the sick as well as for Mass is a statement of belonging and relationship. No one is or can be alone in the Church.

## 6. Thanks and Praise—Liturgy is about **thanks and praise**.

- The dialogue between Priest and people at the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer makes explicit what the Eucharist is – an act of giving thanks to God for all his deeds of redemption which extend to the present enactment of the Paschal Mystery of Christ.
- In the Bible and in the liturgy, *to bless* actually means that we acknowledge that all we have and are comes from God.
- With the Eucharistic Prayer the centre and summit of the entire celebration begins. The entire congregation of the faithful joins itself to Christ in acknowledging the great things God has done and in offering the sacrifice.
- *Eucharist* is much more than a name for Mass. It is the core meaning of what we engage in when we celebrate the Mass – an event of thanks and praise.

## 7. Petition—We offer **prayers of petition** in the context of offering thanks and praise.

- Because of our relatedness to God, to each other and the earth, we can confidently ask God to grant what we lack. The pattern of the liturgy is that we offer praise and thanks to God for the good deeds of our redemption and then, in that context, offer petitions for what we need.
- In the Prayer of the Faithful (Universal Prayer) the gathered assembly prays not only for the needs of the Church, but for the whole world, and especially those in need. We have the confidence to do this because we have just had the ‘good news’ of God’s saving love and mercy proclaimed in the Liturgy of the Word.
- Petition ought not be so dominant that it eclipses the offering of thanks and praise. It is during our acts of thanks and praise that we are reminded of who God is and how God has worked among us for our salvation and sanctification. The deeply felt human need to ask God for what we lack is best understood, then, as a response to God’s own invitation.
- The liturgy is ‘epicletic’, that is, it involves the **action of the Holy Spirit**.
- In traditional liturgical understanding, ‘epiclesis’ means to invoke the Holy Spirit. In the context of the Eucharist, there are two moments of epiclesis:
  - a) the Spirit is called upon to transform the gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ;
  - b) the Spirit is asked to bring about the unity of the Church.

## Challenges for Living a Eucharistic Life

### Catechesis and Education about the Liturgy



- In order that liturgical participation will have its proper effect in people's lives, education about and for the liturgy is essential.
- Liturgical education must go beyond mere externals and ritual performance: the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (SC, no. 16) asks that liturgy be taught under its 'theological, historical, spiritual, pastoral, and canonical aspects'. Liturgy is celebrated within the context of the whole of the Christian life and study of liturgy should reflect this wider context.
- The chief means of being personally and spiritually formed is by participation in 'the sacred mysteries . . . [which are] thoroughly permeated by the spirit of the liturgy' (SC, no. 17).
- Pastors are to promote both internal and external participation. In other words, participation refers to both the outward engagement of our bodies and faculties (sight, sound, smell, taste and touch) as well as the internal engagement of our minds.

## Preparation for the Liturgy

### *What we bring to the liturgy*

- We bring to the liturgy the circumstances of our human lives – both the joys and successes and the challenges, defeats and even tragedies.
- We bring to the liturgy the entire life of the Church: What particular projects is the Church involved in that need our prayerful intercession? What in our Church needs healing or reconciling? What mission countries need our special prayer and intercession?
- We bring to the liturgy our nation and our world. What issues are being faced in terms of peace, equitable distribution of the world's goods? What challenges are we facing with regard to good stewardship of the earth and its resources?

### *Preparation for the Proclamation of the Word*

- Prayerfully reviewing the texts beforehand (as many times as necessary) will allow for a rich experience of the Word, even if there are some things that happen in the event of the liturgy that hinder comprehension.
- The Word challenges us to evaluate our lives before God and invite God to act among us in new ways. The Christian faith is so often about paradoxes (death giving way to life, suffering leading to glory); the challenge is to welcome these paradoxes into our lives and to celebrate them.

### *The Challenge of Table Fellowship Today*

- The celebration of the Eucharist is an act of dining, but contemporary experience in much of the industrialised world does not provide an adequate model of familial dining. Families no longer dine together as often as they once did, and the familiar bonds forged by table conversation can no longer be presumed.
- The Eucharist is always about dining, but it is always about being at table with others at God's gracious invitation. It is always about both Word and altar, about gathering, presenting bread and wine, Communion and dismissing. It is about blessed food and drink taken in relationship, at a sacred meal, in communion with others.
- Table fellowship implies fidelity and relatedness. To break table fellowship is to betray a relationship as

strong as those formed by family and blood relations.

- The act of celebrating Eucharist is to celebrate with and for a Church community that is much wider than our circle of family and friends. It is to be understood as an act that bridges ideological boundaries and cross cultural divisions. The community that celebrates the Eucharist is like a mosaic of stones of different shapes and sizes that together comprise a piece of art offered to the glory of God.

### ***Mission to Live What We Celebrate***

- The simple Concluding Rites make explicit what is implicit and understood: that we are sent forth from the Eucharist to continue to live what we have celebrated. In effect, we *gather* for the sacred Eucharist in order to be *dismissed* from it. To be sent forth is an intrinsic dynamic of the celebration of the liturgy.
- Liturgy calls for changes in our lives and attitudes in life. We gather at God's initiative, we enact the sacred mysteries at his initiative, and are sent forth by him from the gathered assembly to continue our mission in the world.
- When we view all of life through the lens of the Paschal Mystery, we are able to evaluate what really matters and to put away what detracts from living *real* life, based on the Gospel, in the faith and life of the Church.
- 'Worship pleasing to God can never be a purely private matter, without consequences for our relationships with others: it demands a public witness to our faith. . . . Consequently Catholic politicians and legislators, conscious of their grave responsibility before society, must feel particularly bound . . . to introduce and support laws inspired by values grounded in human nature. There is an objective connection here with the Eucharist'. (Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 83)
- The celebration of the Eucharist is not about getting us out of life for a respite in order to be touched and graced by God. Rather, it is more about how this sacred action helps us to experience the living God in this act and then to rediscover that same God in daily life.
- The Eucharist is the Church's privileged means of discovering God in all of life. It is an intense experience of God incarnate among us.

### ***Eucharistic Sacrifice and Sacrificial Living***

- The Eucharist is a sacrifice and taking part in the Eucharistic sacrifice is 'the fount and apex of the whole Christian life' (*Lumen Gentium*, no.11). Implied in this sacrificial understanding is a commitment to lead lives in personal self-sacrifice and in communal self-transcendence as consequences of what the Eucharist is and does.
- Christ's command to *do this in memory of me* can be understood as a call to live our lives in sacrificial service as much as a call to celebrate the Eucharist for generations to come. In other words, the Eucharist calls us to *present your bodies as a living sacrifice* (Romans 12:1).

## **Conclusion**

The celebration of the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday has two features that highlight the spirituality inherent in every celebration of Eucharist: we wash feet and we collect gifts for the poor. We can do none of this if we live in isolation. We need to do all of this because we live in communion with one another and with God.





The Collect for that liturgy sums it all up:

We gather, O God, for the most sacred Supper,  
in which your Only Begotten Son,  
when he was about to hand himself over to death,  
entrusted to the Church for ever  
the new sacrifice and the banquet of love;  
grant us, we pray,  
that out of so great a mystery  
we may draw the fullness of charity and life.