



Theological Reflections on the Mass and on *The Roman Missal*

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Handing on What We Have Received

In his First Letter to the Corinthians St. Paul uses two verbs that indicate the 'traditional' character of the Christian faith. In both chapters 11 and 15 he says that he 'handed on' to his audience the essentials of the faith that he himself had 'received' from the Lord. Those essentials were the Paschal Mystery of Christ and the Eucharist. And the celebration of the Eucharist for the Church in any and every age has always been the enactment of the Paschal Mystery for our sakes and our salvation.

What we do in the Eucharist through words, gestures, signs and symbols is to experience anew for our sakes and our salvation what has been handed on to us from the apostolic Church – our privileged participation in Christ's Paschal Mystery.

Catholicism: A Theological Tradition

In addition to receiving and handing on belief in the Paschal Mystery and its ritual enactment in and through the Eucharist, we also receive, hand on and affirm belief in a number of other things through the Creed and through the Church's entire teaching. We in the Catholic Church do that in a number of ways, one of which is through the Church's explicit teaching (called the *magisterium* from the Latin word *magister* 'teacher') and writings of theologians from throughout the ages. If one is asked *what it means to be Catholic* certainly chief among the answers would be that Catholicism takes very seriously the length, depth and breadth of two thousand years of teaching, theology, prayer, liturgy, spirituality and arts.

One of the chief characteristics of Catholicism is that it is a *theological* tradition. By definition 'theology' means 'words about God' (from the Greek words: *logos* [word] and *theos* [God]). The Church in every age is challenged to take Sacred Scripture and Divine Revelation and the Church's two thousand year history of being a teaching Church and bring all of that to bear on the ever pressing issues of the day. What we do again and again is to *receive* and to *hand on* 'what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes' (1 John 1:1). But by necessity it is our privilege to pass this same faith in ever new ways, both in words and in deeds. The words we use can rightly be called 'theology' in that they are indeed words about God.

The words of theologians and of the Church's magisterium are very important in allowing us to appropriate and apply Divine Revelation given to us in the Scriptures and proclaimed in the liturgy. The history of

theology and the historical evolution of the liturgy evidence continuity and change – continuity with our scriptural roots and foundations and yet also change where those foundational documents have given rise to different applications, interpretations and practices as required by different times and places.

One function of the Church's magisterium is to evaluate theological arguments and assertions to make sure that they conform with orthodox Catholic belief and practice. More often than not assertions of the magisterium are corrective and clarifying. They do not intend to be complete treatises or expressions of Catholic doctrine. In fact there is not and can never be such a comprehensive expression of doctrine – given the very depth, history and breadth of the Church's truly theological tradition.

Catholicism: A Liturgical Tradition

How we pray in terms of rites, symbols, rituals and gestures and *what we say* when we pray in terms of the proclaimed Scriptures and the composed prayers of the liturgy (e.g., Collect, Preface and Eucharistic Prayers) are in effect acts of theology and are filled with theological meanings. Liturgy is enacted theology.

In and through the liturgy God *acts* among us through signs symbols, words and actions. Liturgy is an experience, an occurrence of God among us – particularly to save and redeem us.

Liturgy is ritual event in that by its nature it is a structured, repeated, patterned way of praying to God. We do not 'make it up as we go along'. Rather what we do in liturgy is to repeat what has been given to us; we see the words, rites, symbolic engagement and gestures as things to be probed for the theological insight they reveal about God, the Church and the particular liturgical action taking place. The structures of the liturgy trace their roots as far back as the Judaism of Jesus' day (e.g., Passover, Sabbath, Synagogue, Temple sacrifices). These shaped the earliest forms of the Christian liturgy. They are the roots of what we celebrate today in the reformed Catholic liturgy.

Our understanding of the liturgy today is guided in large part by the Church's liturgy itself and by magisterial documents, particularly *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy from the Second Vatican Council. This document is supremely important because its promulgation in 1963 caused a major restructuring of all the liturgical rites of the Catholic Church. What it says about principles for understanding and appreciating the liturgy in general (nos. 1-14) the directives for the reform of the Liturgy itself (nos. 21-40) and about the Eucharist in particular (nos. 47-58) are especially important and are recommended for further study, reflection and discussion.

In every liturgical celebration, and particularly the Eucharist, the Church continually *receives* the Paschal Mystery of Christ and *hands on* the means to participate (literally 'to take part in' or 'to become one with'). The words, gestures, signs and symbols of the Eucharist matter for the sake of our participation in the faith and also to shape how we understand and comprehend our faith – hence the importance of the classic adage 'what we pray is what we believe': *lex orandi, lex credendi*.

Words matter. They matter in human life. They matter in the liturgy. Using the correct words in the liturgy matters because they describe God, our relationship to God, our need for God and our confidence that God can grant us what we need.

From the fourth century until the present variations on the phrase *lex orandi, lex credendi* have been used to describe how Catholicism has tried to ensure that the words and rites we use in the liturgy are theologically accurate. This adage has been revived of late especially with regard to vernacular translations since Vatican II. We need to make sure that both the Latin texts of the reformed liturgy and vernacular translations are as accurate as possible.

Obviously 'naming God' matters. So does 'naming our need for God' as articulated in the liturgy's prayers. It is a matter of faith and belief that we can and should express in our prayers that God can and will grant us what we need. All of this (and more) are found in every presidential prayer in the Roman liturgy. These prayers express our theology and belief in God. They also express our understanding of how God acts toward and among us through the Mass, which is why every Collect concludes with a Trinitarian formula.

These prayers were originally written in Latin. Translating them from this classical language into the various vernacular languages has challenged and continues to challenge the Catholic Church. Despite its rather judgmental tone, the Italian proverb 'every translator is a traitor' has some merit by the very fact that it is not always easy to capture the nuances, turns of phrase, idioms etc. of one language in another. The immense challenge presented by the mandate of the Fathers at the Second Vatican Council to revise the entire Roman Missal (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 21) is immediately obvious. Certainly one can only applaud and marvel at the speed with which the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) translated the revised liturgies from the late 1960s on. Their work (as was the work of all the language groups) was guided by a document on liturgical translations entitled *Comme le prévoit* (published in 1969).

This document suggested that translators might find it necessary to convey the sense of the Latin original, not by a literal translation of individual words or by reflecting closely the syntax, style and word order of the Latin text. It would, however, be a functionally equivalent translation that would convey in the vernacular language the units of meaning and the primary thoughts and vocabulary contained in the Latin text, if not the strictly literal sense of the original Latin. Thus, when reviewing the current version of *The Roman Missal (Sacramentary)* one should not critique it for its lack of a literal translation, simply because the document that guided translators did not insist on a literal rendering of the Latin text. Nevertheless, it was not very long after the publication of *The Roman Missal (Sacramentary)* that ICEL itself sought to revise the texts.

By the mid 1980s ICEL had begun work on a new translation that sought to remove some inaccuracies that were contained in the Missal translation and take into account new feast days which had been added to the General Roman Calendar. The versions sent to Rome in 1998 did not receive the *recognitio* of the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments (the Holy See's dicastery responsible for giving a final confirmation of vernacular liturgical texts approved by the Conferences of Bishops). In any case, the new third typical edition of the Latin Missal, published in 2002, contained new Latin liturgical texts including new Mass texts (a number of new Prayers over the People) and complete Mass propers or formularies for celebrations in the Proper of Seasons, for new memorials in the Proper of Saints, for the Commons, for Ritual Masses, for Masses for Various Needs and Intentions, and for Votive Masses. Therefore these prayers, to be said in the vernacular, required that these new Latin compositions be translated as well. Hence the enormous and astoundingly arduous task of retranslating the Latin Missal recommenced yet again.

One of the reasons why the 1998 *Sacramentary* did not receive Rome's approval was the judgement that the document outlining how to translate liturgical texts (*Comme le prévoit*) was itself in need of revision. The Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments subsequently published a more detailed document about translations in 2001 entitled Fifth Instruction 'For the Right Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council' *Liturgiam authenticam*, on the use of vernacular languages in the publication of the books of the Roman Liturgy.¹ This set out clearly the basis for the translation of the Third *editio typica* of the Roman Missal, whose Latin version was promulgated in 2000 and printed by Libreria Editrice Vaticana in 2002 (a second printing in 2008 contains some minor changes and additional liturgical texts).

1 Promulgated April 25, 2001. See www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/

The following examples will make it clear why a new translation of the Roman Missal was needed. To offer such examples, however, is not to criticise the former translators, for their work in offering the first official translation of the Eucharistic liturgy into the English vernacular as speedily as possible was in fact a Herculean task, done under great pressure.

Let us look at the Collect for the First Sunday of Advent:

Opening Prayer (1973)

All-powerful God,
increase our strength of will for
doing good
that Christ may find an eager
welcome at his coming
and call us to his side in the
Kingdom of heaven,
where he lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Collect (2010)

Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God,
the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ
with righteous deeds at his coming,
so that, gathered at his right hand,
they may be worthy to possess the
heavenly kingdom.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity,
of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.

Among the deficiencies in the 1973 prayer is the notion of asking God simply to *increase our strength*, whereas the Latin actually asserts that everything we have comes from God (*Da, quaesumus, omnipotens Deus, ...*). The 1973 translation places at least some emphasis on what we humans can do. The debate over whether we receive everything from God or that we can offer things / efforts to God was first debated and defined at the time of St. Augustine. The followers of Pelagius asserted that we humans could contribute to our 'earning' salvation. The counter position was and remains the orthodox Catholic position that anything we have by way of salvation and sanctification is from God. What we humans are to do is to respond to this divine grace. We do not earn it.

The 1973 translation simply refers to being called to *his side in the kingdom of heaven*. The new translation reflects the biblical imagery from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 25 where the righteous are placed at the Lord's 'right hand' in glory, while the damned are placed on his left side. That this prayer picks up on this biblical imagery is important both here and for the principle that often such prayers draw from the Scriptures and the more these connections are made the richer will be our experience of the liturgy as scripturally inspired and based.

The concluding doxology *in the unity of the Holy Spirit* in the new translation reflects a more literal translation of the Latin ending in almost all the prayer texts found in the Roman Missal. The previous Missal repeatedly translated this phrase as *with you and the Holy Spirit*. On the face of it this translation reflects the fact that almost all prayers of the liturgy name and presume the action of the Trinity. Liturgical prayers address God as Father and conclude by making our petition through Christ our Lord, in the Holy Spirit. However, the Latin phrase for the ending of the prayer (*in unitate Spiritus Sancti*) is a bit more nuanced and is literally rendered *in the unity of the Holy Spirit*. In fact the *unity* referred to here is not simply of the Three Persons in God; it is also about the Church praying *in the unity of the Holy Spirit*, meaning that the Church is joined together in and through the Holy Spirit. This subtle translation change means that every time we end a prayer at the liturgy and respond *Amen*, we are also affirming that we are the baptised, those washed in water and signed with the Holy Trinity, whose prayer is made always in, among and for the whole Church.

The unity of the Three Persons in God in the Trinity is the source of the Church's unity.

At the same time it should also be said that sometimes it is very difficult (impossible?) to render in the vernacular the depth and breadth of the meaning of an original Latin text. For example, the prayer for the blessing of ashes on Ash Wednesday contains the following finely crafted rhetorical phrase:

*Deus,
qui humiliatione flecteris
et satisfactione placaris...*

In the 1973 *Roman Missal (Sacramentary)* the translation reads;

Lord
bless the sinner who asks for your forgiveness,
and bless all those who receive these ashes...

The new translation is

O God, who are moved by acts of humility
and respond with forgiveness to works of penance,
lend your merciful ear to our prayers...

What the earlier translation does is to work around the Latin and apply the prayer to the ashes. In effect it is not a translation, whereas the new Roman Missal text tries to reflect the rhythm of the Latin original with the parallelism *moved by acts of humility* and *respond with forgiveness to works of penance*. But it can also be argued that 'acts of humility' is rather more specific than the Latin *humiliatione*, a cognate of the term *humilitas* which has been used in number of religious traditions and counsels within Catholicism not all of which mean self abnegation or anything burdensome. In fact it is argued that in the *Rule of St. Benedict* 'humility' means that one acts and is the same – authentically – wherever one is and with whomever one is. For St. Thomas Aquinas 'humility' means truth.

With *satisfactione* we have a word that has been used in the Catholic theological tradition to refer to Christ's work of redemption. But here again while 'satisfaction' can appear to mean 'making up for' or 'appeasing', in fact like all other notions of Christ's redeeming Death and Resurrection, 'satisfaction' is simply one way of describing God's overwhelming love and initiative to reconcile us with him through his Son's Death and Resurrection. Clearly *works of penance* is a very helpful improvement on the previous text. Nonetheless it is at least arguable that the translators faced what is simply an impossible job – to render in the vernacular words and phrases that have a number of meanings and convey a great deal from the Catholic tradition.

If what we pray is what we believe then we can examine the texts and rites of the Roman Catholic Eucharistic liturgy to glean key insights and to probe what they mean. Again, in the Catholic tradition, *theology* and *liturgy* matter: *lex orandi, lex credendi*.

Catholicism: A Sacramental Tradition

Customarily in Roman Catholicism we use the term *Sacrament* to refer to the seven main channels of grace which we celebrate in the Church in order to experience and participate in the mystery of Christ's salvation. But it is important to look behind this term and to draw out some of the theological richness contained in the simple word *Sacrament*. Two citations from St. Augustine can help in this regard.

In *The City of God* Augustine stated simply and clearly that 'a Sacrament is a sign of a sacred thing'. This description has served Western Catholicism very well since. In fact this is the phrase which St. Thomas

Aquinas uses in his *Summa Theologica*.² To say that a Sacrament is a sign of a sacred thing means that through the sacred signs experienced externally, we experience internally the grace of Christ.

In his treatise on the Gospel of John,³ Augustine asserts that a Sacrament is a kind of 'visible word'. He states that one joins the word to a material element, and behold there is a 'visible word'. This is to say that when we use words (the Sacred Scriptures and the words of the prayers) in the liturgy and things from this earth (light/darkness, water, oil, bread and wine) we experience the unleashing of Christ's salvation again and again.

Just before St. Thomas wrote his *Summa*, Peter Lombard wrote that Sacraments 'do' something. For the first time in Western Catholicism it was Lombard who associated the word *cause* with Sacraments. But he did not neglect the (by now traditional) word *sign*; he asserted that 'Sacraments cause [grace] by signifying...'⁴

Putting this somewhat differently, we can assert that Sacraments 'do' something by using the very means that we use in human life to communicate: words, gestures and things. In using them in a structured way (which is the nature of liturgy) we communicate with God and receive from God all that we need for our spiritual lives on earth - including salvation, redemption, wholeness, joy, healing, sanctification, reconciliation, peace, justice. In effect, we experience the fullness of God's kingdom here in earth. But the *means* through which we experience them matters.

In theological shorthand we can say that what is at work in sacramental liturgy is *the sacramental principle* or sacramentality. *Sacramentality* is that experience, especially in liturgy and Sacraments, whereby all of nature and human reality 'is potentially or in fact the bearer of God's presence and the instrument of God's saving activity...This principle is rooted in the nature of a Sacrament as such, i.e., a visible sign of the invisible presence and activity of God. Together with the principles of mediation (God works through secondary agents to achieve divine ends) and communion (the end of all of God's activity is the union of humanity), the principle of sacramentality constitutes one of the central theological characteristics of Catholicism.'⁵ This means that we do not shun the world and the things of this world to worship God. It means, rather, that in and through Catholic liturgy we revere the things of this earth and marvel at God's work of creation. In effect we praise and pray to the God of creation, as well as the God of the covenant and the God of redemption in every act of liturgy. And every act of liturgy depends on the things of this world to worship God – who is both poignantly immanent in this world and utterly transcendent beyond the confines of this earth.

There is an 'earthiness' and 'primalness' in sacramental liturgy, whether we are using things that are 'natural' and native to the earth, or things which human beings have manufactured from the things of the earth. The following examples will make this clear.

Liturgy of the Hours

Each day at Morning and Evening Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours we refer to the coming of the light of day. It is not coincidental that every day we pray in the Canticle of Zechariah:

In the tender compassion of our God
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
to shine on those in darkness and the shadow of death

2 Thomas Aquinas, ST, III, q. 60 on "what is a sacrament" and the reply "a sign of a sacred thing."

3 Augustine, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 80, 3

4 Peter Lombard, *Commentary on the Sentences*, Bk. 1, Ch. 1

5 Definition taken from *The Harper Collins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995, 1148.

and to guide our feet into the way of peace. (Lk 1:78-79)

The study of the historical evolution of Evening Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours indicates that Psalm 141 has been used from very early in the Church's history at that hour of prayer in which we pray:

Let my prayer arise before you like incense,
the raising of my hand like an evening oblation. (Ps 141: 2)

This psalm was often accompanied by the lighting of the lamps at the arrival of dusk to imitate the lighting of lamps in the Temple at day's end. Currently, this psalm is used in our Liturgy of the Hours for Evening Prayer I, first week of the Psalter.

Baptism

Another example of the use of nature and created reality in Sacraments is the water of Baptism. The same element that plants and humans need to sustain life is the same element that we use in the water bath of Baptism to signify our rebirth to a new life in Christ. There is congruence here between human life and the spiritual, supernatural life, unlocked by the use of the same primal element, water.

At the same time there are other layers of meaning associated with the use of water. While it is the element we need to live, too much water can cause harm or death (by drowning). Hence what the liturgy does is to accompany the use of created things with the proclamation of prayers that bless the element being used and the community that uses them. Again, using Baptism as the example, it would be beneficial to reflect on the prayer which the presiding Bishop, Priest or Deacon uses to bless water at Baptism (which blessing prayer is from the ancient *Gelasian Sacramentary* from the sixth century [Ch. XLVIII, #445]):

O God, who by invisible power
accomplish a wondrous effect
through sacramental signs,
and who in many ways have prepared water, your creation,
to show forth the grace of Baptism;

O God, whose Spirit
in the first moments of the world's creation
hovered over the waters,
so that the very substance of water
would even then take to itself the power to sanctify;

O God, who by the outpouring of the flood
foreshadowed regeneration,
so that from the mystery of one and the same element of water
would come an end to vice and a beginning of virtue;

O God, who caused the children of Abraham
to pass dry-shod through the Red Sea,
so that the chosen people,
set free from slavery to Pharaoh,
would prefigure the people of the baptized;

O God, whose Son,
baptized by John in the waters of the Jordan,

was anointed with the Holy Spirit,
and, as he hung upon the Cross,
gave forth water from his side along with blood,
and, after his Resurrection, commanded his disciples:
“Go forth, teach all nations, baptizing them
in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy
Spirit,”

look now, we pray, upon the face of your Church
and graciously unseal for her the fountain of Baptism.

May this water receive by the Holy Spirit
the grace of your Only Begotten Son,
so that human nature, created in your image,
and washed clean through the sacrament of Baptism
from all the squalor of the life of old,
may be found worthy to rise to the life of newborn children
through water and the Holy Spirit.

May the power of the Holy Spirit,
O Lord, we pray, come down through your Son
into the fullness of this font,
so that all who have been buried with Christ
by Baptism into death
may rise to life with him.
Who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
R. Amen.

We discover that the Church articulates how and why it uses this primal element – recalling water in creation and throughout salvation history and how all of that comes to bear on the dying and rising of Christ and our sacramental participation in his Death and Resurrection through water and words. To repeat St. Augustine, we join an element to a word and there is a Sacrament.

Eucharist

A final example of the use of the things of this earth in sacramental worship is found in the Eucharist. The bread and wine are the very same elements Jesus used at the Last Supper, but unlike light / darkness and water – which are ‘natural’ signs used in worship, bread and wine are signs of a different sort. They are ‘manufactured’ signs (literally made from the *work of human hands* as we say in the preparation prayers at Mass). This means that to probe the full meaning of the value of bread and wine we must recall the process by which things from this good earth came to be signs to be used in the Eucharist. It means that we must value the human ‘work’ and labour which went into manufacturing and producing them. And for both there is a particular process at work – dying and rising.

The cycle of human labour that is behind the element of bread includes planting, harvesting, milling grain into wheat and baking. This bread we then acclaim as *the work of human hands* which will become *the bread of life*. The cycle of human labour that is behind the element of wine includes planting vines, harvesting

the grapes, crushing and fermenting them until they become wine – *the work of human hands* to become *our spiritual drink*. Both bread and wine require work. It is very fitting then, that at the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper we pray over these gifts of manufactured bread and wine (made by human work) and say:

For whenever the memorial of this sacrifice is celebrated
the work of our redemption is accomplished.

(Prayer over the Offerings)

The work of human hands leads us to share in the works of our redemption. Our Eucharistic experience of the work of our redemption is possible by the work of human hands. If 'all liturgy is paschal' in the sense that what we do through the liturgy is to participate in the Paschal Mystery of Christ we can say that the *paschal process* of manufacturing bread and wine is very important simply because it results in the very means through which we take part in the Paschal Mystery of Christ. These elements are the result of dying and rising in nature and human life. What better symbols to use to experience the dying and rising of Christ?

On other days, is it most often in the words of the Preface that we refer to God the Creator or to the gift of creation:

yet you, who alone are good, the source of life,
have made all that is,
so that you might fill your creatures with blessings
and bring joy to many of them by the glory of your light...

(Eucharistic Prayer IV)

or

... you laid the foundations of the world
and have arranged the changing of times and seasons;
you formed man in your own image
and set humanity over the whole world in all its wonder,
to rule in your Name over all you have made
and for ever praise you in your mighty deeds.

(Preface V of the Sundays in Ordinary Time)

Once again the liturgy offers us prayers to accompany the use of natural and manufactured symbols used in the liturgy. What is helpful, then, is prayerful and frequent reflection on these texts as we revere the signs of the liturgy themselves.

Catholicism: A Catechetical and Mystagogical Tradition

Among the ways that the Catholic tradition has *handed on* the faith to ever new generations of believers are *catechesis* and *mystagogy*.

The term *catechesis* comes from the Greek term 'to echo'. In the Church the term reflects the ministry of *handing on* (as noted above from St Paul). Originally it applied to the oral instruction given to adults and children before Baptism (cf. Acts 18:25, Rom 2:18, Gal 6:6), whereas in recent Church documents it is used to describe a ministry of the word (cf. Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, no. 24). More than the acquisition of knowledge, catechesis involves nourishing, developing and deepening faith. Liturgy

and catechesis are inextricably joined together. In fact the celebration of the liturgy and reflection on that celebration is indeed a primary 'catechetical moment' for believers.⁶

The term *mystagogy* also comes from a Greek term meaning 'to teach a doctrine, to instruct in the mysteries'. It is the final stage of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, following sacramental initiation (normally celebrated at the Paschal [Easter] Vigil) and continuing as long as judged desirable to deepen the appreciation by the newly initiated of what occurred in and through water Baptism, Chrismation and Eucharist. The 'classical' models for mystagogy derive from the fourth century when *mystagogical catecheses* (note the pairing of these terms) were given by outstanding Bishop-theologians: St. Ambrose, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. John Chrysostom and St. Theodore of Mospuestia. These catechetical lectures were based on Scripture and the liturgy and witness to the ever important and challenging task of *receiving* and then *handing on* the two central elements of Christianity – the Paschal Mystery and the Eucharist.

The emphasis placed on *mystagogical preaching* during the Synod on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church (Oct. 2008) and the post synod exhortation indicates how important mystagogy is for understanding and being formed in and by the liturgy. The brief assertion in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 52, about preaching being derived from 'the sacred text' has been given depth and breadth in these more recent documents. Again, this ministry concerns the dynamics of *receiving* and *handing on* what we have received.

Themes from and about the Eucharist: An Example of Mystagogy

Given the fact that Catholicism is a theological, liturgical, sacramental, mystagogical and catechetical tradition (among other things) it is now appropriate to turn to describe nine themes that derive from the words and gestures, signs and symbols of the liturgy. If what we pray is what we believe then what the liturgy itself says and does is important for our continual and deepening understanding and formation in the faith. If we allow these themes to speak to us from the celebration of the Eucharist we can glean enormous insight into this Sacrament of Sacraments (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1322-1419), this ineffable 'mystery of faith'. In what follows each theme is introduced by a reference to the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) from Vatican II and part of the exposition is taken from the prayers and rites of the revised *Roman Missal*. In effect, because of the liturgical sources used throughout this could be considered a 'mystagogy' from and about the Eucharist.

The themes are:

- Church Belonging and Expression
- Actualisation of our Redemption
- Paschal Liturgy: Making memory matters
- Manifold Presence of Christ
- Sacrifice: Experienced uniquely in and through the Eucharist
- Participation in the Liturgy: To share in the mystery of God through human means
- Dialogical Nature of the Liturgy
- Liturgical Year
- Eschatological Nature of the Liturgy

6 (Cognates and variations on "catechesis" are "catechetics" (the systematic study of catechesis), "catechism" (a manual of religious education, often in a question and answer format), "catechist" (someone commissioned by the Church to "hand down" the faith tradition), "catechumen" (an unbaptized person undergoing instruction and formation to enter the Church), "catechumenate" (the second period in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* leading up to sacramental initiation) and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (approved by Pope John Paul II for the use of the universal Church; also called the "Universal Catechism").

Church Belonging and Expression

That the liturgy is always an ecclesial event is articulated in and presumed throughout the Liturgy Constitution. But it is specified in no. 26 which states:

Liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations belonging to the Church, which is the “sacrament of unity;” (citing St. Cyprian), namely, the holy people united and ordered under their bishops. Therefore liturgical services have to do with the whole Body of the Church; they manifest it and have effects upon it.

From the earliest description we have of the structure of the Christian Eucharist, from St. Justin the Martyr in about 150 AD through to the proscriptions in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* 2002 the inherent dynamic of the Eucharist is gathering for the celebration and then being sent forth from it. This dynamic action is the key to appreciating what it is that the ‘gathered assembly’ does and is at the Eucharist. What it *does* is gather to experience Christ’s Paschal Mystery through Word and Sacrament. What it *is* is the assembly gathered together by God in order to experience God’s covenant fidelity. In the words of Eucharistic Prayer III (new translation):

Listen graciously to the prayers of this family,
whom you have summoned before you ...

And again in Eucharistic Prayer IV we hear:

Look, O Lord, upon the Sacrifice
which you yourself have provided for your Church.
and grant in your loving kindness
to all who partake of this one Bread and one Chalice
that, gathered into one body by the Holy Spirit,
they may truly become a living sacrifice in Christ
to the praise of your glory.

Such phrases serve as a subtle reminder that God always invites our response; always initiates our experience of redemption at the liturgy. They also serve to remind us that we always stand in need of deeper and more abiding unity. We are the pilgrim Church on earth seeking a fuller share in the unity and peace of God’s kingdom.

We use many words in the liturgy: the words of Sacred Scripture (especially the Psalms), words in the music (hymns) we sing, and words in the prayers and dialogues of the Mass contained in *The Roman Missal*. When it comes to those prayers composed for the *Missal* it is especially notable that almost all of them deliberately reflect the ecclesial reality that is the Eucharist because they are in the *plural*. And all the prayers of the Mass end with the phrase (or a variation on it) *Through Christ **our** Lord* (emphasis added).

For example, The Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I) begins with the words:

To you, therefore, most merciful Father,
we make humble prayer and petition
through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord...

During the Canon we pray:

In communion with those whose memory we venerate...

This phrase underscores our belonging to the Church through all the ages. The fact that the names of Apostles and Martyrs follow accentuates our belonging to a faith tradition that goes back two thousand years. They and we are the 'family album' of Catholicism.

Liturgy is always done in and among the Church. It is the prayer of the Church – here present, of the diocese (we always pray for the Diocesan Bishop by name in the Eucharistic Prayer) and of the Church throughout the whole world (we always pray for the Pope by name in the Eucharistic Prayer).

Actualisation of Our Redemption

The Liturgy Constitution, no. 2, states clearly that it is in the liturgy, 'most of all, in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist', through which 'the work of our redemption' is made 'a present actuality'. Naming liturgy's 'results' matters and the actualisation of 'the work of our redemption' is at the top of the list. What we 'do' in and through the Eucharist is to experience as fully and as intensely as we ever can in this life the salvation God accomplished through his Son Jesus Christ. Whenever the Church's liturgy is celebrated (especially the Eucharist) the work of redemption and salvation is carried on.

The words *redemption* and *salvation* are frequently used in the liturgy's prayers and it is important that we 'unpack' what they mean and apply those meanings to ourselves.

Literally, *redemption* means to buy back: to be set right with God and each other in Christ. The background to this is the separation humanity experiences as a result of the sin of Adam and its need to be reconciled with God by being 'bought back' by Christ. Christ is the new Adam whose obedience to the Father brought us redemption.

The text which the Liturgy Constitution drew on to articulate this notion of redemption is the Prayer over the Offerings on the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper:

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 being accomplished.

One advantage of this new translation is that there is a progressive sense to it in the phrase *is being accomplished*. We know and profess that Christ has fully accomplished our redemption. We also know full well that we have yet to experience it fully and totally. The sense of the new text reflects both what has been fully accomplished (the 'already') and that we have yet to appropriate it totally (the 'not yet').

In fact this is a very important part of our understanding of what the Eucharist is and does. What Christ accomplished was once for all.⁷ What the liturgy enacts is our being able to participate – 'take part in' – this once for all event here and now.

In its essence the Eucharist (and all liturgy) is an event; it is an action, an experience of our redemption. It is sometimes said that for the first thousand years of the Church's life, teaching on the Eucharist really concerned the Church (who could participate; how the Eucharist 'built up' the Church) and in the second thousand years up to Vatican II it concerned the species and how to describe that bread and wine are totally changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. But undergirding any and all statements about the Eucharist is the understanding that the Eucharist is always about inviting and involving us in the dying and

7 The Greek word is *ephapax*. For a profound New Testament exploration of this concept, see the Letter to the Hebrews.

rising of Christ. Jesus' command to 'do this in memory of me' captures how Eucharist is always a dynamic experience of redemption.

The other word that is often articulated in the liturgy's prayers is *salvation*. A major connotation of being saved is being set free – free from our sins and set free to do the things of God. *Salvation* means to be saved from our sins and to be reconciled with God through Christ. In the first Advent preface we pray:

... through Christ our Lord.
For he assumed at his first coming
the lowliness of human flesh,
and so fulfilled the plan you formed long ago,
and opened for us the way of eternal salvation,
so that, when he comes again in glory and majesty ...

A useful exercise would be to review the Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation to see how they reflect on our need for redemption / salvation and how they articulate how this has been accomplished. In particular these prayers emphasise a worldwide scope to our need for reconciliation. They also offer us a sustained hope that reconciliation on this earth is possible simply because Christ has accomplished it for us. We have been reconciled with the Father. The Catholic Church, meaning the Church throughout the world, has a broad expanse. It is uniquely suited to extend Christ's reconciling love to the ends of the earth.

Paschal Liturgy: Making Memory Matters

'All liturgy is paschal'. It is always the commemoration – making memory together – of the past yet ever present and effective Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus.

'Making memory' reaches back to the unique Hebrew way of telling time – past, present, future (the Hebrew is *zikkaron*, the Greek is *anamnesis*). 'To make memory' is to enter yet again into the uniqueness of Christ's Paschal Mystery, so that his mystery and triumph can be our mystery and triumph.

Every act of liturgy is the unique means for us to experience this Paschal Mystery here and now. The Church's teaching about the Eucharist is very clear that what we do at Eucharist is not *reenacting* or *repeating* the once-for-all paschal event. Rather, through the Mass the Paschal Mystery is *perpetuated* (to use the language of the GIRM): it is made effective, it is actualised for our incorporation and participation.

To understand this requires that we adopt a way of 'telling time' that is not merely chronological (that is past, present and future.) 'Chronological time' is when we understand that an event happened in history and we can locate it in time and place – for example, where a person was born, died, where a battle was fought, where a treaty was signed. What we experience day by day is the present. Each day we are given 24 hours to do with as we wish. Often we understand what happened in the past to lead to it. But we do not relive the past in the present. That is impossible in chronological time. And we wait for the days, weeks, months, and possibly years ahead of us which is the future. How often do we presume on chronology as *the way of 'telling time'*, thus establishing our lives as part of the time line in history of persons, places, and things.

But 'liturgical' time is different. On the one hand it does presume on chronological time in that it deals with what occurred in the past, emphasises the present, and looks to the future. But on the other hand, what is unique about liturgical time is that the saving events of the past – Jesus' Death, Resurrection and Ascension – are of such a nature that they cannot be simply relegated to the past. In effect they occur still when we celebrate the memorial of the liturgy. Liturgy is not thinking about the past deeds of Christ. Liturgy is the

present experience of those self same deeds for our sakes and for salvation. We are renewed by them and experience them in their fullness – Death, Resurrection, Ascension. Liturgy does not call us back to Calvary so much as it summons Calvary and the Resurrection and the Ascension to the here and now. This is the genius of the liturgy that makes past events contemporary (in the sense that they cannot be relegated to the past). But their nature they are always contemporary and were destined to be experienced in and through the liturgy. In the famous words of St. Leo the Great: ‘what Christ has accomplished has passed over into the Sacraments’. And what is the Eucharist but ‘the Sacrament of Sacraments’ in which we take part in the entire sweep of saving history – and in particular the dying, rising and ascending of Christ to the Father.

One of the functions of the Eucharistic Prayer is to articulate how these saving events of the past are experienced anew each time we celebrate the Eucharist.

As we hear in Easter Preface I:
. . .in this time above all
to laud you yet more gloriously,
when Christ our Passover has been sacrificed.
For he is the true Lamb
who has taken away the sins of the world;
by dying he has destroyed our death
and by rising restored our life.

The communal *our* and the inherently dynamic character of incorporation into Christ are both at work in the phrasing of this Preface. First, notice the pronouns that modify the death and resurrection – *our* death, *our* life. Second, notice the verbs and the way they link up the once-for-all accomplished Death and Resurrection with our present experience it is – his *dying* and our death, his *rising* and our experience of real life.

This means that through the Eucharistic liturgy human life’s highs and lows, successes and failures, sufferings and triumphs are viewed through the prism of the Paschal Mystery. It means that strengths and triumphs in life are (always) from God, and that life’s tragedies, sufferings and failures are given a new perspective in light of Christ’s true and real physical Death, subsumed by his triumphant Resurrection from the dead – and our participation in that death and life in the Eucharist.

Therefore, O Lord,
as we celebrate the memorial
of the saving Passion of your Son,
his wondrous Resurrection and Ascension into heaven,
and as we look forward to his second coming,
we offer you in thanksgiving this holy and living sacrifice...

(Eucharistic Prayer III)

Manifold Presence of Christ

One of the most frequently cited texts of the Liturgy Constitution of Vatican II, both in subsequent magisterial literature (e.g., General Instruction of the Roman Missal, no. 27) and in theological literature about the liturgy, speaks about how Christ is present and active in the Church in order to accomplish our salvation:

He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of his minister, “the same

one now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross," (quoting Pope Pius XII's Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*) but especially in the Eucharistic elements. By his power he is present in the sacraments, so that when someone baptizes it is really Christ himself who baptizes. He is present in his word, since it is he himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for he has promised: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20).⁸

When viewed against the decrees of the Council of Trent this text takes on especial importance since Trent's concern was to stress two things – real presence and sacrifice. Here the Constitution reminds us of Christ's *manifold* presence and action. What is particularly important is the dynamic character of these assertions – when the Eucharistic sacrifice is offered, when a minister baptises, when the Word is spoken and read in church, when the Church prays and sings. It is also important to see that this text does not speak of *presences* (as though there were more than one and which could be quantified). It speaks about how Christ is present – in manifold ways. Just as we are present to each other in human life by physical closeness, in speaking, in serving others and in dining, so too it is Christ himself who is present and close to us in manifold ways which reflect our human condition and need.

What is very interesting is that the prayers of the Mass rarely speak of God's 'presence' in the liturgy. What do occur in the rite of the Mass, however, are many signs of reverence and respect for God's presence in a variety of ways – for example, to show the relationship of Word and the Eucharistic action at the altar. During the entrance procession the Deacon (or reader) carries in the Book of the Gospels. While this procession was envisioned in the reform of the Mass in 1970 it was specifically emphasised in the revision of the Mass in the 2002 version of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal and is now commonly done. At the end of the procession the Deacon places the Book of the Gospels on the altar, signifying the unity of the two parts of the Eucharist: Word and altar. This is a subtle reiteration of the assertion of the Liturgy Constitution (no. 56) that 'the two parts that... go to make up the Mass, namely, the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist, are so closely connected with each other that they form but one single act of worship'. This unity of the 'two tables' of word and altar is also ritualised at every Mass when we are invited to Communion and reply to the Priest by saying:

Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof,
but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

This is an explicit reference to the healing of the centurion's son in Mt 8:5-13. That the centurion's act of faith in Jesus' word (vs. 8) is used as we approach Communion has often been used to describe the healing that occurs when Jesus' name and presence is invoked.

Another example of unifying Word and altar occurs when the antiphons prescribed to be sung during the distribution of Communion reflect back to some part of the Liturgy of the Word for that day. For example, on Christmas day the Communion Antiphon is taken from the Responsorial Psalm of that day *All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God* (Ps. 97:3). On the Sundays of Lent, verses from that day's Gospel are used. On the First Sunday the Gospel verse (from the Matthean account of Jesus' temptation) suggested is: *Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God* (Mt. 4:4). On the Second Sunday, the verse (from the Matthean account of the Transfiguration) is: *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; listen to him*. Then, for the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent, the Communion Antiphons are all taken from the Gospel texts for that day.

⁸ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 7.

Other indications of a certain liturgical paralleling of Word and altar are the following:

- both the Book of the Gospels and the altar are kissed, as an act of reverence;
- both the Book of the Gospels and the Eucharistic species are held up for all to see;
- that incense can be used as a sign of reverence before the proclamation of the Gospel and at the words of institution during the Eucharistic Prayer.

The October 2008 Synod on 'The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church' can itself be seen as a parallel to the October 2005 Synod on 'The Eucharist in the Life and Mission of the Church'. What is interesting is that the titles for these synods include the phrase 'in the life and mission of the Church'. Certainly evident here is the fact that Word and Eucharist are vital for the Church's life. They are also seen as sending us forth into the world to live what we celebrate. Again there is a parallel here between the act of coming together for the Eucharist as the 'gathered assembly' of God's people and every act of Eucharist ending with a dismissal that we might live in the world what we have celebrated – through Word and altar - in the Eucharist.

Sacrifice: Experienced Uniquely in and through the Eucharist

Another very important and frequently quoted assertion from the Vatican II documents comes from the Constitution on the Church (*Lumen gentium*, no. 11), which offers a very careful (and challenging) assertion about the Church's role in the Eucharistic Sacrifice:

Taking part in the Eucharistic sacrifice, the fount and apex of the whole Christian life, they [the gathered assembly] offer the divine victim to God, and offer themselves along with him.

That the Eucharist is a sacrifice has been a constant teaching and assertion in Catholicism. But from the sixteenth century this central tenet of our doctrine took centre stage, the understandable result of Reformation controversies about the Eucharistic Sacrifice. The Fathers at the Council of Trent were keen to assert and emphasise the sacrificial action of the Mass by decreeing that 'in the Eucharist a sacrifice is offered'. What is interesting is that this first assertion about sacrifice has very liturgical, dynamic overtones in that the way it is phrased emphasises the unique and dynamic action that the Eucharist is. Similarly the just cited text from Vatican II offers a dynamic appreciation of how the whole Church, in the gathered liturgical assembly, is involved in the action of the Eucharist. Put somewhat differently, it is important to underscore how the magisterial texts of our Church emphasise the *enactment* and *celebration* of the liturgy of the Eucharist over assertions about the revered Eucharistic species only. Again and again these documents speak about the action and enactment as a consequence of the dominical command: 'do this in memory of me'.

What is behind these assertions about sacrifice (and which may have been unfortunately lost at the time of the Reformation) is a notion of time in which what occurred once-and-for-all in history, the Death and Resurrection, is also present and actualised here and now in the liturgy. All that was asserted above about *memorial* should be recalled here as we try to comprehend the specific nature of the Eucharist as sacrifice. The Church's magisterium clearly avoids any kind of language that would hint of repetition. Rather, the chosen phrasing in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (no. 47) is:

Our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until he should come again, and in this way to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection. (This text is repeated in the GIRM, no. 2).

In and through the liturgy, the whole Church participates in the fullness of Christ's perfect sacrifice. Like the assertions about Christ's presence, this text challenges us to appreciate the dynamism of the Mass in which we are to offer the sacrifice with the Priest,⁹ and challenges liturgical communities to see that the offering of the Eucharistic Sacrifice should also be reflected in the offering of sacrifice outside of the liturgy in the way we live our lives. The words of St. Paul ring very true as a perennial challenge: 'present your bodies as a living sacrifice...' (Rom 12:1).

Participation in the Liturgy: To Share in the Mystery of God through Human Means

A constant refrain in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* is:

...that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for 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, 4-5) is their right and duty by reason of their Baptism (no. 14).

The integration reflected in this text is poignant and compelling – 'Church belonging' is a result of Baptism and 'liturgical participation' is nothing less than orchestrating and articulating this reality.

While statements on participation in the liturgy came from official magisterial documents as early as 1903 from Pope Pius X and immediately prior to the Council,¹⁰ it was certainly with the reforms of the liturgy after Vatican II that popular participation became just that – popular and commonly expected. The externals of the liturgy were reformed precisely to engage believers in their sacred duty and privilege of participating in the sacred liturgy. By its very nature liturgy respects and reflects our humanity. Just as in human life and human interaction, so also in liturgy we use our bodies, minds, voices and hearts. What we humans do in life is taken over into the liturgy as the means whereby we participate in the liturgy. Just as we dine and share foods to sustain human life, so in the Eucharist we dine and share sacred foods to sustain the divine life within us.

Liturgy is more than words spoken and understood. The words and actions of the liturgy are to be engaged in, and that engagement should lead to participation in the life of God, in the living God here and now. The theological principle undergirding participation is the Incarnation – God came in human flesh so that we humans could become God (St. Augustine). The liturgy's words, gestures, symbols and silence are the means for doing this.

Dialogical Nature of the Liturgy

Part of the 'active participation' which the liturgy presumes and which is to be fostered in every celebration of the Eucharist is the dialogue that takes place between and among ministers and God. We engage in the liturgy through God's gracious and continual invitation as seen in the words of Eucharistic Prayer III which speaks about the 'this family, whom you have summoned before you'. What we do in and through the liturgy is done at God's gracious invitation. Our privilege is to respond by participating both in the liturgy's rites and in life itself.

Examples of the dialogical nature of the liturgy abound. The greeting *The Lord be with you* and its response *And with your spirit* at the beginning of Mass, at the Gospel, at the Preface, and at the Dismissal underscore how the entire liturgy is predicated on dialogue. The acclamations at the end of the proclaimed Scriptures

9 Cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 48 and *Lumen gentium*, nos. 10-11.

10 Cf. Pius X, *Motu Proprio Tra le sollecitudini*, and the Sacred Congregation's 1958 document on participation.

at Mass *Thanks be to God and Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ* are among the ways the baptised faithful fulfil their duty in participating in the liturgy. These acclamations are our assent to what has been proclaimed. It is our welcoming the good news of salvation occurring here and now among us through the proclamation of the Word. The Responsorial Psalm of the Liturgy of the Word functions as a ratification of what we have just heard in the First Reading. It is meant to be our prayerful reflection on it and prayerful appropriation of it. The procession of the gifts of bread and wine by representatives from the faithful indicate the participation of the gathered assembly. The procession of the whole community to receive the consecrated bread and wine, transformed in the Eucharistic Prayer, follows upon an invitation to Communion. Both these processions reflect how our bodies are used in the liturgy.

Liturgy of the Word

The Scriptures are not only stories, histories and words on a page; they are literally stories recounted in the liturgy so that through them God can act among us. The phrase from the Letter to the Hebrews (4:12) that the Word of God 'is sharper than any two-edged sword' implies that it calls for our response. The proclamation of the Word is an announcement that we are to listen to and respond to in liturgy and in life. Welcoming the proclaimed Word is easier sometimes than at other times. Certainly the paradigm for welcoming and wrestling with the Word is the scene of the Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38). While vs. 38 ('Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word') is legitimately used as a model for our obedience to the proclamation of the Word, there are two other phrases in this text that are worth reflecting on, especially when it seems hard to welcome the Word to have its effect in our lives. We are told that Mary was 'much perplexed by his words' (vs. 29) but that the Archangel's greeting to her was 'Do not be afraid' (vs.30). The fact that Mary was afraid¹¹ should give us comfort when that is exactly our state when confronted with God's Word and the call to live according to it.

Later on in the same Annunciation story we hear Mary asking 'How can this be since I am a virgin?' (Lk 1:34). Again her example of questioning (not unlike that of Zechariah at the announcement that he and Elizabeth would be parents at their advanced age in Lk 1:18) can offer us consolation when we question what the Lord is asking of us when the Word is proclaimed. So often the Gospel contains paradoxes and assertions that are contrary to popular belief: that suffering leads to glory, humiliation to exaltation, obedience to triumph, death to life. Or the Word challenges us to see God's mercy active in unexpected ways, such as in the lost coin, the lost sheep and the prodigal son (Lk 15) or when labourers who work longer or shorter hours still get the same pay (Mt 20:1-16). It is especially when our initial instinct may be to say 'unfair' that Mary's questioning can be helpful, even inspiring.

It is one thing to engage ourselves in the dialogue of the Liturgy of the Word with acclamations and the refrain to the Responsorial Psalm. It is another to live out in the rest of our daily lives what we have heard proclaimed through the Scriptures at the Eucharist. In fact sometimes that is one of the main purposes of celebrating both Word and Sacrament: so that in the gift of the Sacrament we can be more deeply converted to the God we worship.

Dismissal

The last of the responses at Mass is *Thanks be to God* after the Deacon (or Priest) 'dismisses' us from the Eucharistic assembly with the words *Go forth, the Mass is ended*. This (albeit brief) 'dialogue' summarises the intrinsic dynamic of what the celebration of the Eucharist is: our assembling and our eventual dispersion to the world to live what we have celebrated.

11 Cf. also Mt 1:20, where Joseph is in a similar situation.

Pope Benedict XVI makes the clear link between participation in the Eucharist and living it out in our daily lives in *Sacramentum caritatis* (no.52): '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 fact that he has asked for additional forms of dismissal at the end of Mass to emphasise this life relation is an additional support for appreciating how the Eucharist and daily life are to be linked. Two of the newly-added options for the dismissal are:

Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.

and

Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.

Again, it is one thing to respond verbally to the Deacon's dismissal. It is another – and it is the true 'test' of the dynamic of the Eucharist – when we live the values and truths of the Word of God in the marketplace of our daily lives.

The Liturgical Year

The liturgical year is not a biography of Jesus nor is it merely the recounting of his paschal triumph. Rather the celebration of the feasts and seasons of the liturgical year at the altar of the Eucharist is for our appropriation of these saving mysteries. As Preface IV of the Sundays in Ordinary Time states:

For by his birth he brought renewal to humanity's fallen state
and by his suffering canceled out our sins;
by his rising from the dead he has opened the way to eternal life
and by ascending to you, Father, he has unlocked the gates of heaven.

The genius of the liturgical year is our *progressive assimilation* into the Paschal Mystery of Christ. As we pray in the Prefaces for the Dead:

For as one alone he accepted death
so that we might all escape from dying;
as one man he chose to die
so that in your sight we all might all for ever. (II)

For it is at your summons that we come to birth,
by your will that we are governed;
by your command that we return
in virtue of the law of sin,
to the earth from which we came.
And when you give the sign
we, who have been redeemed by the Death of your Son,
shall be raised up to the glory of his Resurrection. (IV)

We all have to die. The Paschal Mystery as celebrated in the Eucharist is the means we have to deal with the fundamental mysteries of life, such as limitation, suffering and ultimately death. These fundamental questions provide the necessary context for considering the enactment of redemption that occurs in the liturgical year.

The Eucharistic memorial is never merely the redoing of time past, or even the past entered into in the present. It is also future time experienced now and the eternal future invoked to bring chronological time to an end.

As we pray in Preface I of Advent:

. . . so that, when he comes again in glory and majesty,
and all is at last made manifest,
we who watch for that day
may inherit the great promise
in which we now dare to hope.

The celebrations of feasts and seasons concern the impact on the present of redemptive time, both past and future. The continual eschatological pull of the liturgy is a very important element. From this perspective the liturgy can never be interpreted as 'time past, reenacted'; rather, it is 'the present experience of redemption longing for fulfilment'.

This eschatological tug is part of the function of the Prayers after Communion and the memorial sections of the Eucharistic Prayers. The addition of the Ascension in the third and fourth of the newly composed anaphoras [Eucharistic Prayers] (III *his wondrous Resurrection and Ascension into heaven*, and IV *his Resurrection, and his Ascension to your right hand*) is particularly significant in that it articulates the reliance of the present Church on the term of the Paschal Mystery - the Ascension - where Christ lives to make intercession for us.

The Church community celebrates Eucharist in the context of feasts and seasons, so that the redeemed community may enter more fully into the central mysteries of faith. The means we have of celebrating this ecclesial and paschal memorial are essentially two: the proclamation of the Word and the enactment at the altar. What is foundational in the liturgical act of making memory is the dynamic of human communication, i.e., speaking and being spoken to, proclaiming and responding to proclamation in specific times and places. Like much of the rest of the Sacred Scriptures, the Gospels communicate interpretations of Jesus' message and mission. They are never merely the recounting of brute facts. All texts are interpretations. The proclamation of varying accounts of the same Gospel event (e.g., the Passion) invites appropriation of these varied accounts for the varied communities that hear them.

The very arrangement of a Lectionary means that pericopes are taken out of their native contexts in the Bible and placed in the Lectionary to shed light on the season commemorated, the specific liturgy celebrated (e.g., Eucharist, Sacrament, Hours) and the particular community present to hear them (e.g., monastic, parish, academic, inner city community, etc.).

The homily is an intrinsic part of the Word because it reflects the relationship between the texts proclaimed and this particular community, in this year of our Lord, in this country, etc. The homily is constitutive of the proclamation of the Word. When we experience a new context in the world, in the Church, in our worshipping communities, etc. there is a new setting in which we hear the same texts and because of those varied contexts experience those texts differently. The preacher's privilege is to give voice to applying those perennially valuable texts to the here and now. It is often said that the preacher's task is 'to comfort the disturbed and to disturb the comfortable'. A two-edged sword indeed!

Another important contextual factor for interpreting the Scriptures proclaimed is the particular liturgy at which they are proclaimed. For example, the Matthean account of the Beatitudes (Mt 5) is assigned for All Saints Day; it is also an option for a wedding and for a funeral. Similarly St. Paul's reflections on Baptism in Romans 6 is proclaimed every year at the Paschal (Easter) Vigil, but this same text is an option for Masses when initiation takes place and for the rite of sacramental reconciliation. Finally, the extremely rich text of the prologue to the Gospel of John on Christmas day (Jn 1:1-14) reflects a great deal about the import of the Word becoming flesh (v. 14), yet this same text is used in several Eastern Rite liturgies for Easter. In that

paschal setting references to cosmos and to creation would loom large as a complement to the proclamation of Genesis 1, the story of creation.

It is not just proclamation of words that is taking place during the Liturgy of the Word at the Eucharist; there is also a theological phenomenon at work here. Recall the insight of St. Augustine that 'the Word is joined to an element and there is a Sacrament'. The heart of the liturgy is the proclamation and enactment of Word and altar.

The fact that Jesus accomplished the Paschal Mystery on this earth makes a part of this earth (Palestine) especially holy in terms of place. Hence we call a place the 'holy land' since it was the particular locus of Jesus' ministry. However, too much focus on that place can narrow the focus of how the whole earth is the locus of salvation accomplished once for all and continually appropriated in the present. The particularity of a given place is meant to articulate a theology of the sacredness of the whole world. This means that place and time, correlatives of any liturgy, are correlatives for their theological meaning as well.

This is to say, that it is important to appreciate the reality of what Easter initiation (especially the Eucharist) means as opposed to recalling what happened in the first century in Jerusalem. The latter is imitative and can be severely limited. The former is filled with important potential to articulate the meaning of the Paschal Mystery through the Easter feast. This timeless experience is contemporised primarily through the sacramental ritual.

Similarly, at Christmas the Church commemorates the Incarnation of the Word at a Eucharist as a reminder that Incarnation leads to Death, Resurrection and Ascension. If all liturgy is paschal, then it is necessary that at Christmas our attention be drawn not merely to the events of Christ's birth – giving due emphasis to the Incarnation – but also to the experience of the fullness of the Paschal Mystery. This means allowing the paschal subtext of the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke to be drawn out in preaching.

Certainly one of the key terms that needs explanation is the 'today' of liturgical commemoration. Through the liturgical year's feasts and seasons we experience the same paschal event from various aspects, e.g., Advent-Christmas-Epiphany, and Lent-Easter-Pentecost. The classic liturgical assertion 'this is the day the Lord has made' and 'this Easter day' is found throughout the liturgy on Easter and its octave. Foundational here is the understanding of 'day' as the *eternal* day of the Lord which triumphed over darkness and sin.

The celebration of the Eucharist during the liturgical year is not a yearly retelling of the biography of Jesus; rather it is the community's progressive assimilation into and appropriation of the Paschal Mystery in our personal and communal lives.

Eschatological Nature of All Liturgy

Every time we pray the Lord's Prayer we say, *thy kingdom come*. Among other things this means that as long as we remain here on earth we are waiting the completion of our redemption in Christ and we look forward to his coming again in glory at the end of time to bring time to an end.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy puts it this way:

In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God... (no.8).

In descriptions of the Eucharistic liturgy in the early Church we read that they often would end with the acclamation *Maranatha* (a Greek term meaning 'come, Lord Jesus!') The subtle but clear message here is that while the liturgy is the centre of our faith and is our here-and-now experience of redemption in Christ, it is also and always a provisional experience until we see God face to face in the kingdom of heaven. This plea underscores how we plead for Christ to come again and for his kingdom to be realised in its fullness. In the meantime, the liturgy is the closest we can come to the perfect experience of that kingdom here on earth.

The technical term that describes this reality is 'eschatology', a word taken from the Greek *eschatos* meaning 'end'. This aspect of Christian theology deals with what will happen at the 'end' of time to us personally and communally. To emphasise this aspect of the liturgy is to give us hope even as we deal with imperfection and incompleteness in our own lives. When we hear texts in the liturgy about this incompleteness we should be encouraged that God has not abandoned us and we should be challenged to help realise all those things Christ came to bring on earth – peace, reconciliation, solidarity, joy, love, etc.

A major contribution of post Vatican II Eucharistic liturgy is the eschatological emphasis in the prayers of the Eucharist. In the Roman Canon there was no explicit mention of the Second Coming. The phrase in the memorial prayer speaks rather about Christ's Death, Resurrection and Ascension:

Therefore, O Lord,
as we celebrate the memorial of the blessed Passion,
the Resurrection from the dead,
and the glorious Ascension into heaven....

Compare that phrase with the texts of Eucharistic Prayer III which, at that same point in the prayer, says:

Therefore, O Lord,
as we celebrate the memorial
of the saving Passion of your Son,
his wondrous Resurrection and Ascension into heaven,
and as we look forward to his second coming....

Or Eucharistic Prayer IV:

as we now celebrate the memorial of our redemption,
we remember Christ's death
and his descent to the realm of the dead,
we proclaim his Resurrection,
and his Ascension to your right hand;
and as we await his coming in glory,
we offer you....

The very same emphasis is found in two of the three memorial acclamations:

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

When we eat this Bread
and drink this Cup,
we proclaim your death, O Lord, until you come again. (second)

We are also reminded of this eschatological aspect of the Eucharist when the Priest invites us to Communion by saying:

Behold the Lamb of God,
behold him who takes away the sins of the world.
Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.

This text is like many others in the liturgy in that it has more than one meaning. In addition to inviting us to partake in the Body and Blood of Christ in Communion, this text also reminds us that 'this supper' in this Eucharist is also an anticipation of being at the eternal banquet with Christ in the kingdom for ever. The biblical source for this invitation is Rev 19:9 where we hear about 'the supper of the Lamb' in eternity. This image of intimacy with God at and through the Eucharist is another way the Church reminds us that although we here on earth yearn for a 'new heavens and a new earth', nevertheless, for as long as we remain on this good earth God sustains and supports us at the altar table of the Eucharist with the food of everlasting life.

This same sentiment is found in the prayer at the end of the Order for the Blessing and Sprinkling of Water:

May almighty God cleanse us of our sins,
and through the celebration of the Eucharist
make us worthy to share at the table of his Kingdom.

The eschatological meaning is clear. This world will come to an end and our individual lives will come to an end. We face both with the encouragement that comes from our belief in a paschal faith that makes us watch for Christ's return at the end of time to bring time to an end. In the meantime we celebrate the Eucharist in joyful hope and eager expectation. At the Eucharist, in a privileged and unique way, we receive again and again what St. Paul handed on to us what he himself received: belief in the resurrection and the experience of the resurrection through the Eucharist. And we, the liturgy's ministers and faithful gathered assemblies, hand on to each other what we have seen and heard – the unique mystery of Christ himself – and what we have ourselves received from our forebears in the faith.

Conclusion

One of the ways that the Church in every and any age passes on to the next generation what was handed on to them is the celebration of the Eucharist. One of the tasks facing the translators of *The Roman Missal* was to make the translations as accurate as possible for the sake of fidelity, not simply to a Latin text but to those elements of the Catholic theological tradition enshrined in these texts. If in fact what we pray is what we believe then these texts should be as correct as possible. Words matter. Prayer matters. *The Roman Missal* matters very much. It is a principal means for us to 'hand on' to generations yet unborn what we ourselves have 'received' from countless generations before us. What a ministry! What a privilege! What a challenge!