

Faith Formation Lex Orandi

S T . I G N A T I U S L O Y O L A P A R I S H

LEX ORANDI, LEX CREDENDI

LITURGY
SACRAMENT
TRADITION
REFORM
PRAYER
BELIEF
VATICAN II



Translating from one language to another is not always precise. Yet it is the precision of the Latin

formulations that often trip us up when we rely upon them for our prayers, statements of faith and even practice of our faith. “Lex orandi lex credendi” is a phrase that describes a principle of liturgy. Roughly translated it says that what we believe follows from what (how) we pray. Of course nothing is as simple as four words and nothing is without different interpretations.

I know that many of us are old enough to remember the liturgy of the Eucharist before the changes of Vatican II. Prayers were in Latin, the priest faced away from the congregation towards the main altar, and the people were separated from the sanctuary by the “communion rail.” There were, of course, reasons and benefits from this manner of liturgy, including universality (the same throughout the world), a sense of the transcendent as the prayers rose from the people through the priest to the high altar and up to heaven, a preservation of sacred space like the temple of Jerusalem with the innermost “holy of holies” where only the temple priests were allowed.

The “reform” of the liturgy of Vatican II was not so much a revolution to modernize the ways in which we pray as

it was a way to recapture the source and origins of the liturgy, an evolution to meet the needs of today. The goal of the reform is summarized in the first paragraph of the document **SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM**, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, promulgated by Paul VI, December 4, 1963.

https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html

This sacred Council has several aims in view: it desires to impart an ever increasing vigor to the Christian life of the faithful; to adapt more suitably to the needs of our own times those institutions which are subject to change; to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ; to strengthen whatever can help to call the whole of mankind into the household of the Church. The Council therefore sees particularly cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the liturgy.

Part of this understanding of “Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi” is the basic understanding that sacraments are not just ritual, rather that they are a living revelation of God and God’s grace. Taking as a model the rite of initiation of catechumens,

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Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi (cont)

there is a need both for instruction so that those to be initiated understand the rites, but also for a catechesis of experience where the rites themselves reveal and instruct—commonly referred to as *mystagogia*. While one may talk about an immersion as part of the ceremony of baptism, there is nonetheless an added component when one has experienced it. The same with the acclamations that often accompany such a sacrament whereby welcome and membership is confirmed. The same with the sense of peace that many experience as a result of the sacrament of reconciliation or the wonder of a couple leaving the sanctuary at the end of their wedding ceremony. Our rituals and liturgies are not simply ritual, they are to be a lived experience as well as a revelation of God and God's grace.

Fr. Rick Hilgartner has a nice paper on how the liturgy was changed by Vatican II to include more of Scripture in the celebration of the sacraments. ([Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi](https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/catechetical-sunday/word-of-god/upload/lex-orandi-lex-credendi.pdf) <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/catechetical-sunday/word-of-god/upload/lex-orandi-lex-credendi.pdf>) While the article is focused on the expanded use of scripture in the Eucharistic liturgy, including a three year cycle of Sunday readings and a more robust use of the Old Testament, his point isn't just more Scripture but rather how we interact with the Scriptures. He states:



The homily that follows the readings is meant to open up the Scriptures and make connections to the lives of the faithful. The homily is for the “nurturing of the Christian life.”

One phrase used to describe this engagement of the liturgy with all as well as with the faith of all is “a full and active participation.” This goes beyond the mere repetition of word and action to that “connection to the lives of the faithful.” How does that happen?

In engineering we have a concept called “the law of unintended consequences.” Sometimes things happen that we just didn't foresee. Of course the selection of music and the gathering of talented musicians and artists can help that “active participation” that is sought. But here at Loyola we find that the “kiss of peace” has been one of the unanticipated blessings where folks experience community in a blessed way and God is revealed in the faith and the love of the people. The mark of a good liturgy is whether people talk with one another when they leave the church building—for then we see the results of coming together in a growth in charity.

As Fr. Hilgartner notes at the end of his article,

“In the early Church, it was the celebration of the liturgy and the Church's prayer that led to the development of articulated statements of faith—not the other way around. In light of that development, it is clear that sacraments celebrated well and experienced profoundly have the power to teach, to witness to what the Church professes and believes...”

It is this bigger picture that our reform should consider and not be bogged down by the number of prescribed bows, the times of kneeling and the use of words like “consubstantial”. Many of the wars over liturgy miss the point—that of a liturgy that inspires faith, that leads us to an encounter with Jesus, that leads us to a more Christian life, not alone but together.

Where have you found the liturgy successful in meeting these goals?

Reforms vs. Restoration



Although Vatican II called for a “reform” of the liturgy way back in 1963 (Sacrosanctum Concilium) with a period of adaptation and experimentation in subsequent years. And while, to many of us, it seemed that these changes were in fact permanent, the “rule” of liturgy still continues to evolve. (You may have noticed changes to the language used in mass that was implemented back in 2011.) And while Pope Benedict XVI allowed all to celebrate liturgy according to the form established in 1962, Pope Francis eventually issued a follow-up letter restricting the use of this version of the Mass.

(Traditionis Custodes https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/20210716-motu_proprio-traditionis-custodes.html)

Why is all this so important? In the magazine *Sapientia* from the Center for Religion and Culture at Fordham University, Rita Ferrone writes about what’s at stake, “Discerning Lex Orandi.” <https://crc.blog.fordham.edu/faith-religion/discerning-the-lex-orandi/>

At the popular level, some associate the liturgical reform entirely with ephemera, such as new music or a modern aesthetic. But the reform was not undertaken merely to introduce guitars or discourage the use of chapel veils or change around the furniture in the sanctuary, though it has done all those things. The reform has always had a much more serious theological agenda.

If the stakes were not higher, we would not have the intensity of emotion that we see in the media today. But Ferrone points to that deeper significance that many of us failed to see.

Perhaps the most important theological shift in emphasis in the liturgical reform was the introduction of the idea of the paschal mystery as the central mystery that the liturgy celebrates. In reaction to the Reformation, the Council of Trent had emphasized sacrifice as the theological center. Without abandoning the notion of sacrifice, Vatican II restored to our understanding of the liturgy the full context of the pascha—the passing over of Jesus, from his redemptive suffering and death, to new life, and to glory.

So it is not merely a matter of personal preference, rather the rituals and the prayers that are part of these rituals, do signify what we believe. And, in this sense, there can be no turning back as some desire.

Ferrone further notes in her article how the reform of the liturgy has once again brought about the recognition of the centrality of scripture in all our liturgical celebrations, the greater role of the laity in the liturgy displacing one of the forms of clericalism, and an orientation towards a full, active and conscious participation by all. Previously many had seen their role in church as one of silence and one of private prayer. Indeed, this was one of the needs for the ringing of the bell at the consecration because so many were caught up in their private devotions.

Throughout various articles it has been noted that this full, active and conscious participation requires better instruction of the Church for the laity in “what happens” at the Eucharist, not merely the actions and gestures but the meaning and history of these.

Maybe we should include a Q&A for some of even the simple things. Maybe we should offer a class not only in bible studies but in the sacraments and in the liturgy. That way we can fulfill this role as pastor of souls, helping all to be enriched by the liturgy and truly come to encounter Christ in the Eucharist.



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To Ponder and to Share

Essential Elements of the Eucharist

- **Actions: Take, Bless, Break and Share**
- **Word: Readings from Scripture**
- **Table: Bread and Wine**
- **Persons: Presider and Congregation**
- **Parts: Greeting, Penitential Rite (occasionally omitted, e.g. funeral liturgy), Liturgy of the Word, Presentation of the Gifts, Eucharistic Prayer, Communion, Sending/Blessing**

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Finding God in All Things

What Has Changed?

Have changes in the liturgy changed your life? That is, do you pray differently, do you believe differently, do you live differently as a result of the changes in the liturgy?

Of course there are many who are not old enough to have experienced the changes from the "Latin Mass" to what we know today. On the other hand, there are many who are turning to the more traditional style of liturgy because it appeals to their sense of the transcendent.

But it is a serious question. How did hearing the Mass in English affect you? What happened for you when the altar was turned to face the community? What did it mean when the communion rail disappeared or veils were no longer required or music changed to something more modern and popular?

Hopefully some of the changes led to something new for you. Maybe you began to think about how you could participate in the liturgy. (I know that for women these roles did not open up for many years.) Maybe you spent less time with your nose in a prayer book and more watching what was happening. Maybe you liked holding hands at the Our Father or wishing peace to others.

Now that the liturgy has matured more, do you notice a change in the content and manner in which homilies are delivered? Do you remember the songs more when you leave church than in earlier days? Has the liturgy changed the way in which you think about others, about what Jesus calls you to be and do? Do you think we have moved forward in the sense of promoting a full, active and conscious participation in the liturgy? Do you think grace is automatic from attending a Sunday service or does it require something on your part?

These questions are not offered as a test for you but for your own reflection and your conversations with others. So, where do you find God revealed in the liturgy? Is it, as Vatican II expressed, finding the person of Jesus in the book (scripture), at the table (communion), in the people (congregation) and in the person of the presider (priest)? What has been most helpful to you for sustenance in your life, support in your prayer and renewed connection to the community?

