

# PERSON AND PASSION: LITURGY IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH



*The Texts*

## WHAT DOES “LITURGY” MEAN?

*leitos:* public *ergon:* work—“public work”

Of the “sacrifices” in ancient Israel, these are of note:

- 1) **Holocausts** or **Burnt Offerings** (e.g., Judg. 13:16, 19-20): An act of immolating an animal completely through which God’s complete power and might is acknowledged.
- 2) **Communion Sacrifices** or **Peace Offerings**: (Lev. 3): An act of killing an animal and sharing the meat (etc.) between God, the priest, and the offerers.
- 3) **Sacrifices of Expiation**: Two types: Sin Offering and Guilt Offering.

*Angelic*

Are they not all ministering (*λειτουργικά*) spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

-**Hebrews 1:14**

*Cultic*

And when his time of service (*λειτουργιας*) was ended, he went to his home.

-**Luke 1:23**

And every priest stands daily at his service (*λειτουργων*), offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

-**Hebrews 10:11**

While they were worshiping (*λειτουργουντων*) the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

-**Acts 13:2**

*Charitable*

For the ministry of this service (*λειτουργιας*) is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.

-**2 Corinthians 9:12**

For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service (*λειτουργησαι*) to them in material blessings.

-**Romans 15:27**

### *Among the Fathers*

All these things are plain to us who have scanned the depths of sacred lore. It follows, then, that there ought to be strict order and method in our performance (*λειτουργίας*) of such acts as the Master has prescribed for certain times and seasons.

-**Clement of Rome, 1 Corinthians 40 (d.96)**

Leitourgia, often translated “liturgies,” consisted in the ancient world of any “public service performed by private citizens at their own expense.” Thus we have the modern phrase for a religious liturgy, a “worship service.” In the Greaco-Roman world these liturgies were public, fiscal obligations of members of the leading class to their fellow citizens and their fulfillment could be onerous. Skilled orators were sometimes rewarded for their rhetoric by being exempted, though it was more common to use rhetoric precisely to gain support and attention for one’s leitourgia. In classical Athens the ordinary leitourgia, or liturgies, were the *gymnasiarchia* (funding public education and physical training), *choregia* (paying for the choruses that performed at public festivals) and *hestiasis* (funding public feasts). All leitourgia included sacrifice; thus the essential association of the word with religious ritual practices.

-**Susan Holman, *The Hungry are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia* (2001), p. 21**

### **CHRISTIAN LEITOURGIA...THE WORK OF REDEMPTION**

For the liturgy, "through which the work of our redemption is accomplished, "most of all in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, is the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church. It is of the essence of the Church that she be both human and divine, visible and yet invisibly equipped, eager to act and yet intent on contemplation, present in this world and yet not at home in it; and she is all these things in such wise that in her the human is directed and subordinated to the divine, the visible likewise to the invisible, action to contemplation, and this present world to that city yet to come, which we seek. While the liturgy daily builds up those who are within into a holy temple of the Lord, into a dwelling place for God in the Spirit, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ, at the same time it marvelously strengthens their power to preach Christ, and thus shows forth the Church to those who are outside as a sign lifted up among the nations under which the scattered children of God may be gathered together, until there is one sheepfold and one shepherd.

-***Sacrosanctum Concilium* 2 (4 December 1963)**

Through the liturgy Christ, our redeemer and high priest, continues the work of our redemption in, with, and through his Church.

-***Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1069**

### **THE MYSTERY AND NATURE OF THE CHURCH**

God who "wills that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4), "who in many and various ways spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets" (Heb. 1:1), when the fullness of time had come sent His Son, the Word made flesh, anointed by the Holy Spirit, to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the contrite of heart, to be a "bodily and spiritual medicine," the Mediator between God and man. For His humanity, united with the person of the Word, was

the instrument of our salvation. Therefore in Christ "the perfect achievement of our reconciliation came forth, and the fullness of divine worship was given to us".

-*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 5 (4 December 1963)

He achieved His task principally by the paschal mystery of His blessed passion, resurrection from the dead, and the glorious ascension, whereby "dying, he destroyed our death and, rising, he restored our life."

-*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 5 (4 December 1963)

Just as Christ was sent by the Father, so also He sent the apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit. This He did that, by preaching the gospel to every creature, they might proclaim that the Son of God, by His death and resurrection, had freed us from the power of Satan and from death, and brought us into the kingdom of His Father. His purpose also was that they might accomplish the work of salvation which they had proclaimed, by means of sacrifice and sacraments, around which the entire liturgical life revolves. Thus by baptism men are plunged into the paschal mystery of Christ: they die with Him, are buried with Him, and rise with Him; they receive the spirit of adoption as sons "in which we cry: Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15), and thus become true adorers whom the Father seeks. In like manner, as often as they eat the supper of the Lord they proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes. For that reason, on the very day of Pentecost, when the Church appeared before the world, "those who received the word" of Peter "were baptized." And "they continued steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles and in the communion of the breaking of bread and in prayers . . . praising God and being in favor with all the people" (Acts 2:41-47). From that time onwards the Church has never failed to come together to celebrate the paschal mystery: reading those things "which were in all the scriptures concerning him" (Luke 24:27), celebrating the eucharist in which "the victory and triumph of his death are again made present," and at the same time giving thanks "to God for his unspeakable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15) in Christ Jesus, "in praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:12), through the power of the Holy Spirit.

-*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 6 (4 December 1963)

## PERSON AND PASSION

To accomplish so great a work, Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister, "the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross," but especially under the Eucharistic species. By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man 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 promised: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).

-*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7 (4 December 1963)

In this age of the Church Christ now lives and acts in and with his Church, in a new way appropriate to this new age. He acts through the sacraments in what the common Tradition of the East and the West calls "the sacramental economy"; this is the communication (or "dispensation") of the fruits of Christ's Paschal mystery in the celebration of the Church's "sacramental" liturgy.

-*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1076

By his [the Holy Spirit's] transforming power, he makes the mystery of Christ present here and now. Finally the Spirit of communion unites the Church to the life and mission of Christ.

-*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1092

Christian liturgy not only recalls the events that saved us but actualizes them, makes them present. The Paschal mystery of Christ is celebrated, not repeated. It is the celebrations that are repeated, and in each celebration there is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that makes the unique mystery present.

-*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1104

His Paschal mystery is a real event that occurred in our history, but it is unique: all other historical events happen once, and then they pass away, swallowed up in the past. The Paschal mystery of Christ, by contrast, cannot remain only in the past, because by his death he destroyed death, and all that Christ is - all that he did and suffered for all men - participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times while being made present in them all. The event of the Cross and Resurrection abides and draws everything toward life.

-*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1085

Christ indeed always associates the Church with Himself in this great work wherein God is perfectly glorified and men are sanctified. The Church is His beloved Bride who calls to her Lord, and through Him offers worship to the Eternal Father.

-*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7 (4 December 1963)

The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God...

-*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 59 (4 December 1963)

## **FAITH, LITURGY, AND MORALS**

The sacred liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church. Before men can come to the liturgy they must be called to faith and to conversion...

-*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 9 (4 December 1963)

Therefore the Church announces the good tidings of salvation to those who do not believe, so that all men may know the true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, and may be converted from their ways, doing penance. To believers also the Church must ever preach faith and penance, she must prepare them for the sacraments, teach them to observe all that Christ has commanded, and invite them to all the works of charity, piety, and the apostolate. For all these works make it clear that Christ's faithful, though not of this world, are to be the light of the world and to glorify the Father before men.

-*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 9 (4 December 1963)

Worship, that is, the right kind of cult, of relationship with God, is essential for the right kind of existence in the world. It is so precisely because it reaches beyond everyday life. Worship gives us a share in heaven's mode of existence, in the world of God, and allows light to fall from that divine

world into ours...It lays hold in advance of a more perfect life and, in so doing, gives our present life its proper measure.

**Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger** (Benedict XVI), *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (2000), p. 21

*Transcending divisions of poverty and class:*

Who is not overcome as their plaintive cries rise in a symphony of lament? What ear can bear the sound? What eye can take the sight?...In the hot sun and the dust they writhe at men's feet; and sometimes, too, they are tormented by biting cold and rain and blasts of wind and narrowly escape being trampled on only because we find it repugnant to come into contact with them. Their mournful pleas stand in jarring contrast to the sacred chanting within and their piteous lament forms a counterpoint to the mystic voices.

**Saint Gregory Nazianzus** (329-389), *Oration 14.13*

*Transcending divisions of race:*

In the liturgy of the New Covenant every liturgical action, especially the celebration of the Eucharist and the sacraments, is an encounter between Christ and the Church. The liturgical assembly derives its unity from the "communion of the Holy Spirit" who gathers the children of God into the one Body of Christ. This assembly transcends racial, cultural, social - indeed, all human affinities.

**-Catechism of the Catholic Church** 1097

## THE CONSUMMATION OF LITURGY...HEAVEN

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

**-Revelation 7:9**

After this period God shall rest as on the seventh day, when He shall give us (who shall be the seventh day) rest in Himself. But there is not now space to treat of these ages; suffice it to say that the seventh shall be our Sabbath, which shall be brought to a close, not by an evening, but by the Lord's day, as an eighth and eternal day, consecrated by the resurrection of Christ, and prefiguring the eternal repose not only of the spirit, but also of the body. There we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise. This is what shall be in the end without end. For what other end do we propose to ourselves than to attain to the kingdom of which there is no end?

**Saint Augustine** (354-430), *The City of God* 22.30