

Pastors page: The Centrality of the Liturgy and the Importance of Devotional Practice

Six points from the US bishops website (usccb.org) frequently asked questions:

1 - **Liturgy and the Sacraments come first.** Liturgy is the center of the life of the church. Popular devotions should never be portrayed as equal to the liturgy. They cannot adequately substitute for the liturgy. Popular devotions should be in harmony with the liturgy, drawing inspiration from it and ultimately leading back to it. For example, no prayer addressed to anyone but God the Father, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, should be part of the general intercessions (prayer of the faithful). (e.g. the Hail Mary). And no prayer should be added to the Communion Rite that is incompatible with its meaning. On Good Friday, the devotion of the Way of the Cross should not overwhelm or displace the solemn Service of the Lord's Passion.

2. **While liturgy does come first, the liturgy and popular devotions are two forms of worship which are in mutual and fruitful relationship with each other.** The liturgy is a beautiful tapestry which presents and makes present the whole mystery of salvation. Popular devotions can tease out certain threads from that tapestry or highlight certain aspects of the mystery, making them more accessible to people from various cultural settings or at various levels of liturgical awareness. For example, devotional prayers to the Blessed Mother, the rosary, a Novena to certain saints may help to highlight the bonds that unite us with the Saints, and the support that we receive from the prayers of Mary in keeping faithful to the Gospel in our own time and place. Such devotions should bring us back to the central truth that *Christ is the one mediator* between God and the human race. *Love for the Saints necessarily includes and leads to love of Christ and to love of the holy Trinity.*

3. **The Bible is at the center of what God has revealed to the church.** Popular devotions, prayers and novenas to the Sacred Heart, the Immaculate Conception, etc. and to various Saints should all be filled with biblical themes, imagery and language. John Paul II insisted that the rosary is not a substitute for the reading of the Bible-“On the contrary, it presupposes and *promotes prayerful reading of the Holy Scriptures.*” The rosary consists of meditation on mysteries taken from the Gospels.

4. While liturgy and the sacraments, celebrated by the universal church, are central to Christian spirituality, **popular devotions allow what is experienced in liturgy to permeate the daily lives of people in their own culture.** Devotions to our Lady of Guadalupe, our Lady of Fatima, and our Lady of Lourdes are examples of this. “*We must be aware that in our church today in the United States there are various ethnic groups who are living in different cultural contexts. We must be sensitive to the fact that these groups often find that some devotional practices meet their spiritual needs better than others.*” (US bishops)

5. **Popular devotion developed out of the spiritual needs of God's people.** The Stations of the Cross began as the practice of pilgrims journeying to the holy city of Jerusalem. They were retracing the final journey of Jesus Christ to Calvary. Over time

this translated to our present 14 stations that encircle the interior of nearly every Catholic church today. The 150 Hail Marys of the rosary were adapted from the monasteries in the Middle Ages. The monks would pray in common the 150 Psalms of the Old Testament; and this was adapted in the development of the rosary to the same number of Hail Marys ó 150.

6. The Catholic Church is both visible in 1.3 billion baptized believers in the world; and invisible in the billions of believers who have died and been born into eternal

life. We profess in the Creed our belief in the communion of saints and the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. We remain united with both the living and the dead in our prayers. We can pray for those on the way to heaven (in purgatory) and asked them to pray for us. This includes both those in purgatory and those in heaven (the communion of saints). *“For after they have been received into their heavenly home and are present to the Lord, through Him and with Him and in Him they do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, showing forth the merits which they won on earth through the One Mediator between God and man.”* (Vatican II)

“Love of the Saints necessarily includes and leads to love of Christ and to love of the Holy Trinity”. (US Bishops)

The love and honor that we express for Mary and the Saints is called ***veneration***. ***Veneration is not adoration. Adoration belongs only to God.*** Veneration, meaning to regard with reverential respect, is a word similar to honoring. And ***Veneration leads us to worship of God*** who created the men and women (the Mother of the Savior most of all) who cooperated with God’s grace and lived as Saints. But Christ alone is the mediator between God and the human race. Jesus Christ is always to be adored as the living God.