



Episode 16: The Liturgist & Liturgiologist

SUMMARY

What is the difference between a liturgist and a liturgiologist? This is an important question because the answer has an impact on how we approach participation in the Mass. A liturgist is one who offers public worship of God. The Church teaches that Christ is the Supreme Liturgist, offering himself entirely to the Father. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy insists that Christ himself is the priest. The Liturgy is the action of Christ and of his Body, the Church. Following the pattern of Christ, then, the liturgist is the one who actually prays at Mass.

The liturgiologist, on the other hand, studies the liturgy, critiques it, evaluates it. The liturgiologist stands outside the liturgy and, in doing so, it is clear that this one is not praying.

If Christ himself is the liturgist, our prayer is effective because we join our worship to his. With Christ, we offer ourselves to the Father. We let go of what we want individually. This attitude is essential for real participation in the Mass. This participation requires that we let go of what we want for the sake of the common

good—that is, for the sake of the Body of Christ.

Genuine and authentic participation requires that we let go of ourselves and follow the model of Saint John the Baptist who says, “I must decrease so that Christ may increase.” (Cf. John 3:30).

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

Rightly, then, the liturgy is considered as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. In the liturgy the sanctification of man is signified by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which corresponds with each of these signs; in the liturgy the whole public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and His members.

From this it follows that every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the priest and of His Body which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others; no other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree. (n° 7)

Roman Missal

Attention must therefore be paid to what is determined by this General Instruction and by the traditional practice of the Roman Rite and to what serves the common spiritual good of the People of God, rather than private inclination or arbitrary choice.

General Instruction, n°. 42

[T]he Priest should be attentive rather to the common spiritual good of the People of God than to his own inclinations.

General Instruction, n°. 352

IN THE TRADITION

“In obedience, therefore, to her Founder’s behest, the Church prolongs the priestly mission of Jesus Christ mainly by means of the sacred liturgy. She does this in the first place at the altar, where constantly the sacrifice of the cross is represented and with a single difference in the manner of its offering, renewed. She does it next by means of the sacraments, those special channels through which men are made partakers in the supernatural life. She does it, finally, by offering to God, all Good and Great, the daily tribute of her prayer of praise.” [...] “The sacred liturgy is, consequently, the public worship which our Redeemer as Head of the Church renders to the Father, as well as the worship which the community of the faithful renders to its Founder, and through Him to the heavenly Father. It is, in short, the worship rendered by the Mystical Body of Christ in the entirety of its Head and members.”

Pope Pius XII,
Mediator Dei

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

✠ “The liturgy is the work of the whole Christ, head and body. Our high priest celebrates it unceasingly in the heavenly liturgy, with the holy Mother of God, the apostles, all the saints, and the multitude of those who have already entered the kingdom.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 1187

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

[G]rant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ.

Eucharistic Prayer III

Gladden us with holy joys, almighty God, and make us rejoice with devout thanksgiving, for the Ascension of Christ your Son is our exaltation, and, where the Head has gone before in glory, the Body is called to follow in hope.

*Collect
Ascension of the Lord*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Genuine participation in the Mass provides an opportunity for each to exercise the Christian virtues of patience, humility and charity. For which virtue do you need to pray?
2. Why is it important to actually pray at Mass rather than evaluate its performance?

FOR FURTHER READING

Pope Pius XII, *Encyclical on the Sacred Liturgy: Mediator Dei*, November 20, 1947.