



What is the Sacred Liturgy?

After the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), when the word liturgy sprang into more common usage, its definition (from the Greek *leitourgia*) – the work of the people or work on behalf of the people – soon resulted in an emphasis solely on the first, rather than the more important second understanding. Some explain this as a consequence of the Council's call for "full, active and conscious participation" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 2, 14) in the worship of the Church as the "right and duty" of the Christian people, particularly as individuals and the entire assembly gradually assumed a more active role in liturgical celebrations. It is true that, immediately after the liturgical reforms of Vatican II, the tendency was to focus on the assembly's role in the celebration of the Liturgy while failing to recognize the more important "work of God" being accomplished in the assembly's midst. While a better balance in understanding both aspects of the Liturgy now exists, an even greater grasp of what the Church believes and teaches about the Sacred Liturgy will bring forth much fruit for the life of the Church.

Source and Summit

Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy reminds us that "in order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions," (SC, 11) in short, we must be

prepared. If we are prepared, we will realize that the Sacred Liturgy is the Church's official public and communal worship. But it is more than that. As we prepare, we must realize that the Eucharistic Feast is "the font from which all her power flows" (SC, 10) and simultaneously, it is "the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed" (SC, 10). As our *source and summit*, Sacred Liturgy moves the faithful to be "one in holiness" (SC, 10). Imagine that: prepare, celebrate, and be joined with one another in holiness. What a gift!

As the Church's principal act of worship, the Liturgy also includes the celebration of the six additional sacraments, the official daily prayer of the Church (the Liturgy of the Hours), and liturgies for special celebrations. As the Church's official worship, each of these liturgies has at its heart the celebration of the "Mystery of our Faith" – that is, the sacred Passion, Death and Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ. This mystery, known as the Paschal Mystery, is the continuing work of our redemption by Christ and through his Church.

Mystery Made Manifest

Sacrosanctum Concilium also reminds us that the Old Testament, as the history of God's amazing deeds among the people of Israel, was "but a prelude to the work of Christ the Lord in redeeming mankind and giving perfect glory to God" (SC 5, 2; cf. St. Augustine). By his obedience to the Father's will and plan of

salvation and by his redemptive self-sacrifice, Jesus, the new Adam, destroyed the power of sin and death and made possible eternal life.

The Gospels tell us that, as he hung upon the cross, there came forth from Jesus' wounded side blood and water – understood in time as symbolic of the mystery of the

