

# THE LITURGY AS THE CENTRE OF OUR FAITH LIFE



**UNPACKING THE EMMAUS SERIES**

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**THE EMMAUS SERIES**



Questions Catholics ask on their journey of Faith

# THE LITURGY AS THE CENTRE OF OUR FAITH LIFE

## SESSION 1

### Introductory reading

*The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of Vatican II*

*It makes clear one of the principal objectives of the Second Vatican Council.*

The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all her powers flow ... (n. 10)

But in order that the sacred liturgy may produce its full effect, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions ... It is the duty of pastors to ensure that the faithful take part knowingly, actively and fruitfully ... (n.11)

Such participation by the Christian people as a 'chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people' (1 Peter 2:9) is their right and duty by reason of their baptism. In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit ... (n.14)

The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful (when present at the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice) should not be there as strangers or silent spectators ... They should be instructed by God's Word, and be refreshed at the table of the Lord's Body; they should give thanks to God by offering the Immaculate Victim ... they should learn to offer themselves in union with the Saviour's self-offering. Through Christ the mediator, they should be drawn into ever closer union with God and with each other ... (n.48) ◇

### Questions opening up the topic

*Groups have a Buzz Session – in the spirit of Sympathetic Listening described in the booklet 'Getting Started' pp. 14-15 – sharing reactions to the following questions:*

#### Question

- ◆ Do you enjoy your Sunday Mass? Why?
- ◆ What problems do we face in today's parish communities as we celebrate the liturgy?

## Viewing of DVD

- ◆ Introduction
- ◆ Chapter 1:  
A Key to Renewal
- ◆ Chapter 2:  
The New Testament Origins of the Liturgy
- ◆ Chapter 3:  
The Model Liturgy of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century.

## Sharing of reactions to the presentation

*Groups have a Buzz Session – in the spirit of Sympathetic Listening described in the booklet 'Getting Started' pp.14-15 – sharing immediate reactions to the presentation:*

### Question

- ◆ What has struck you as enlightening, inspiring, or even puzzling?

## A reading related to the theme

*Life and Liturgy (1962, pp 243-44) by Louis Bouyer*  
*It describes the spirit of the liturgy in the early Church.*

For the Christians of antiquity, the liturgy was not only a school of prayer, *the* school of prayer, but it *was* their prayer. In the collective prayer, each took his own part and so made it his own most personal prayer ... The full reading of the Word of God, explained by the living tradition of the Church which spoke through the lips of the Bishop, led to prayer. This prayer was usually prompted and schooled by the psalms, and it was always finally summed up in the 'collects' (of the presiding minister); but this summing up took place only after everyone had been given time to pray his or her own personal prayer, not apart from the whole Church, but at the height of his communion with it. Then the Eucharist took the personal offering of the believer, and by means of the *Prex sacerdotalis*, i.e. the consecration, brought it into Christ's own sacrifice; and when that transfigured offering was given back in Communion, it was in order to take the Christian himself into the risen Christ. Therefore, his or her life was to be, with that of the Church itself, at once that continuous festival of the Christian year and the school of asceticism which Christian life should be, when the presence of the Mystery in it is understood as it should be ...

But this state of affairs began to change when the liturgy, which had been for long a living practice, began to be fossilized; this happened because the Christian culture in which the liturgical forms had been elaborated was itself deteriorating. The process of fossilization continued until, at the turning point of the Middle Ages, that is about the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the common people could not understand even the literal meaning of the liturgical texts, since, except for the clerics and intellectuals, Latin had become a dead language. ◆

## Final reflective sharing

*This final sharing of personal responses to the questions given below is the most important phase of the session, and should be entered into generously, in the spirit of the Sympathetic Listening described in booklet 'Getting Started' pp. 14-15.*

*It may begin with a brief period of silent reflection, which is followed by two stages:*

- 1. An informal Buzz Session in which each participant is able to express their response to each question – questions should be discussed separately.*
- 2. The sharing is brought to a conclusion, with each participant expressing, in a few words, what is their personal response to each question – in view of all that has been discussed in the session.*

### Questions

- ◆ Does what has been said about the New Testament origins of the Church's Liturgy give you a clearer understanding of the Sacraments and their relationship to God's act in Christ's resurrection?
- ◆ What features of the Liturgies of the early Church do you see as providing a model for us as we renew our liturgical life?

# THE LITURGY AS THE CENTRE OF OUR FAITH LIFE

## SESSION 2

### Introductory reading

Christ the Sacrament (1963, pp 13-16)

by E. Schillebeeckx's

*It describes the PASCHAL MYSTERY that is perpetuated in the Church's liturgical celebrations.*

Christ is God in a human way, and man in a divine way. As a man he acts out his divine life in, and according to, his human existence ... The humanity of Jesus is concretely intended by God as the fulfilment of his promise of salvation; it is a messianic reality. This ... implies that the encounter between Jesus and his contemporaries was always on his part his offering of grace in a human form. For the love of the man Jesus is the human incarnation of the redeeming love of God: an advent of God's love in visible form. Precisely because these human deeds of Jesus are divine deeds, personal acts of the Son of God, divine acts in visible human form, they possess of their nature a divine saving power, and consequently bring salvation ... Although this is true of every specifically human act of Christ, it is nevertheless especially true of those actions which, though enacted in human form, are according to their nature exclusively acts of God ... in a most particular way in the great mysteries of his life - his passion, death, resurrection and exaltation to the side of the Father ...

The man Jesus, as the personal visible realization of the divine grace of redemption, is *the* sacrament, the primordial sacrament, because this man, the Son of God himself, is intended by the Father to be in his humanity the only way to the actuality of redemption ... Personally to be approached by the man Jesus was, for his contemporaries, an invitation to a personal encounter with the life-giving God, because personally that man was the Son of God. Human encounter with Jesus is therefore the sacrament of the encounter with God. ♦

### Questions opening up the topic

*Groups have a Buzz Session – in the spirit of Sympathetic Listening described in the booklet 'Getting Started' pp. 14-15 – sharing reactions to the following questions:*

#### Questions

- ♦ Does what we have seen in the first session help you to understand what the liturgical renewal of Vatican II aims to achieve?
- ♦ It is sometimes suggested that – since God's Church will accompany the history of humanity until the end of time – the story of the Church's life may still be in its initial stages. Do you think that this is so with regard to what we have seen of the history of the Church's liturgy?

## Viewing of DVD

- ◆ Chapter 4:  
The Liturgy Eclipsed by Popular Devotions
- ◆ Chapter 5:  
Towards Genuine Renewal

## Sharing of reactions to the presentation

*Groups have a Buzz Session – in the spirit of Sympathetic Listening described in the booklet 'Getting Started' pp. 14-15 – sharing immediate reactions to the presentation:*

### Question

- ◆ What has struck you as enlightening, inspiring, or even puzzling?

## A reading related to the theme

*An alternative reading is provided in pages 24-25*

*A homily of St Augustine*

*He explains what an active participation in the liturgy of the Eucharist involves.*

Dearly beloved, that fullness of love with which we must love one another, the Lord defined when he said, 'Greater love no one has than this - that someone lay down their life for their friend'. There follows from this what the same evangelist, John, says in his epistle: 'As Christ laid down his life for us, so ought we lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters', loving one another as he loved us, he who laid down his life for us.

Doubtless, this is what one reads in the *Proverbs of Solomon*: 'If you sit down to eat at a ruler's table, observe carefully what is before you; and know that you must prepare a similar meal'.

For what is 'the ruler's table', if not where there is taken the body and blood of him who laid down his life for us?

And what is 'sit at it', if not to approach humbly?

What is to 'observe carefully what is before you', if not to ponder worthily so great a favour?

What does it mean, 'know that you must prepare a similar meal', if not what I have said already, that as Christ laid down his life for us, so we too ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

In the words of the apostle Peter: 'Christ suffered for us leaving us an example, that we should follow in his steps'. This is 'to prepare a similar meal'. This the blessed martyrs did with burning love. If our celebration of their memory is not an empty one, and if we approach the Lord's table in the banquet in which the martyrs and saints also shared and had their fill, then as they 'prepared such a meal', so should we. □

## Alternative reading

*Life and Liturgy (1962, pp 107, 166, 188, 254)*

*by Louis Bouyer*

*Bouyer explains the 'PASCHAL MYSTERY' and its centrality in the faith of the Church.*

Why is it the will of Christ to be present everywhere and for ever? In order that the eternal gift of God in the coming forth of his Word from the Father, the eternal gift of his love - that is of his deepest being - should replenish and fulfil all time by becoming the fullness of all being, newly created in Christ. Therefore, God's gift of himself proclaimed by Christ the Word became, by means of his Cross, the active reality of that new creation in this world of ours...

This *transitus* (this passage through death to the life of a child of God in Christ) is itself our fundamental participation in the *transitus* (or passage) that is the PASSOVER OF CHRIST, the essence of the Mystery leading to life eternal through the death of the Cross ... This process has brought into existence for mankind and for the whole world, a reality which is to fill all time ... To speak more precisely, the Cross of Christ, together with his entire historical life (which ever tended towards the Cross) has brought forth the enduring fruit of Christ's resurrection and glorification ... Christ is now ... the heavenly Man, the ultimate Man, in whom all of us are to die in order to live again, in his own divine life ...

A personal meditation on the Bible in the school of the liturgy will mean that the Bible itself will once more be illuminated for us by the reality of the Mystery as it is always present in the sacramental order, and, through it, in the whole liturgy. Thus all the dangers of an approach to the Bible without or against the Church will be avoided. And the Bible in turn, understood in this way (and so having become the supernatural world of all our thoughts and meditation, and the food of our prayer) will lead us to the full liturgical life, that is, to a life of self-offering in the Eucharistic Sacrifice of Christ and of communion in the fullness already achieved of his Mystery.

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## Final reflective sharing

*This final sharing of personal responses to the questions given below is the most important phase of the session, and should be entered into generously, in the spirit of the Sympathetic Listening described in the booklet 'Getting Started' pp. 14-15.*

*It may begin with a brief period of silent reflection, which is followed by two stages:*

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### Questions

- ◆ Though it is absolutely central to the message of the New Testament, the PASCHAL MYSTERY is still not a familiar concept to many Catholics. Have you gained a clearer understanding of its meaning, and of its importance?
- ◆ If Vatican II's renewal of the liturgy is to be achieved, what are some of the things that need to be done in our parish communities?



## SUMMARY OF PRESENTATION

The renewal of the Church's life envisaged by Vatican II looks to the celebration of the Word of God and the Sacraments - in a renewed liturgy - as the central focus of Christians' faith awareness. For many centuries, however, the majority of Catholics have related to their God through the popular devotions that have been so important in their lives. Helping people to appreciate the importance of the liturgy in their lives is, therefore, a delicate pastoral problem – taken up by the Holy See in *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* (2002).

History helps us to understand how this problem arose, and how it can be overcome. The Church's liturgy had its origins in the wonder and thanksgiving of the first Christians, as they shared their new-found faith in the Paschal Mystery – the Saviour's death and resurrection, as the perfect worship of the Father: shared with them as a source of new and eternal life. For the Christians of the first five centuries, this spirit enlivened the liturgies that are now held up as a model to be imitated. In the Church of the Fathers, personal faith awareness and prayer were inspired by sincere participation in the liturgy. During the troubled Dark Ages (6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries) the liturgical rituals were carried on, but appreciation of the Paschal Mystery being celebrated diminished. A religious revival in the High Middle Ages (11<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries) promoted the tradition of popular devotions that has continued until our own day. The importance of the Resurrection - so fundamental for an appreciation of the Paschal Mystery - came to be lost sight of, as these devotions emphasized the human sufferings of the Saviour, more than the divine mystery of God's final achievement in creation in the Lord's Resurrection. In later centuries the liturgical traditions were preserved as an official ceremonial that was like a background to popular devotions. Long before Vatican II, it began to be recognized that this situation needed to change, so that the Church could find a new vitality in the liturgy's celebration of the Word of God in the Scriptures and the Paschal Mystery perpetuated in the Sacraments.

The goal of Vatican II's renewal is to make the liturgy the wondrous centre of faith awareness in a renewed Church. Rather than do away with the popular devotions that have nourished the faith of many people, the Holy See recommends that they be used as a means of leading people to a new appreciation of the riches to be found in the liturgy. ◆

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