

Liturgical Spirituality

“Liturgical spirituality, far from being confined to the liturgy, extends the spirit of the liturgy into the whole of life.... liturgical spirituality is not one spirituality among many but the spirituality of the Church, clearly distinguished from others. It is such because liturgy is the prayer of the Church.” (James Dallen)

There are a variety of spiritualities in the Church today: Benedictine, Franciscan, Jesuit, etc. but the one spirituality that is common to all of us is liturgical spirituality. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy tells us that “the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed, at the same time it is the fount from which all the Church’s power flows. (CSL 10) When we truly believe and live this out, the liturgy becomes the foundation of all that we do - and all that we do brings us back to our weekly (or daily) celebration of the liturgy.

We can consider liturgical spirituality in two ways: one, what happens when we participate in the Mass - how our presence makes a difference to those around us; and, two, how we allow what we do at the liturgy to permeate the rest of our lives.

It is God who calls us to come together and celebrate. Participation in the liturgy is our response to God’s call. We come together as the Body of Christ to worship and celebrate. According to the noted theologian and liturgist, Nathan Mitchell, “the first principle of a liturgical spirituality ... is the recognition that worship is God’s work, God’s activity of reconciling humankind in Jesus’ blood. If our liturgical activity obscures this fundamental fact, then it is a waste of time.”

We form a visible manifestation of the Body of Christ. We become a holy people gathered in Christ’s name achieving unity and charity in the midst of our diversity. As such, we have certain rights and responsibilities. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal lists for us “the Duties of the People of God.” According to the GIRM, we...”form one body, whether by hearing the word of God, or by joining in the prayers and the singing, or above all by the common offering of Sacrifice and by a common partaking at the Lord’s table. This unity is beautifully apparent from the gestures and postures observed in common by the faithful.” (GIRM 96)

So, our primary role at Mass is to become part of the one Body of Christ, setting aside our individual wants and preferences and uniting with everyone else present as we sing, pray, listen and partake of the Body and Blood of our Lord. When we do so, we feed and nourish ourselves and we also feed and nourish the souls of everyone else present in the assembly.

No matter what time of season of the year, when we celebrate the liturgy, we celebrate and are formed into the Paschal Mystery - the life, death and

resurrection of Jesus Christ. According to theologian James Dallen, “The liturgy forms the community into the Paschal Mystery, which is always the focus. The liturgy is this formative and foundational for the Christian life, lived in Christ for the transformation of the world.” - which brings us to the second aspect of liturgical spirituality: how our celebration in the liturgy affects our lives outside of the Mass itself.

At the end of every Eucharistic celebration, the priest or deacon instructs us to “Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.” This is actually a command from Jesus himself. After we have gathered, listened, given thanks and shared in the sacred meal, we are to go forth and make a difference in the world. In fact, one of the dismissal options in the new translation of the Roman Missal makes the command even clearer: “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.”

The liturgy is not something we celebrate once a week, only to go home and forget about it. The Scripture readings we hear and our sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ should make a difference in our lives. We need to live the Paschal Mystery outside of the Mass. Gradually, through our regular participation in liturgy, our lives are transformed. We become more God-like in our actions and in our attitudes toward others.

“Liturgy invites us to gaze more deeply, not upon some extraterrestrial haze, but upon human life itself.... Liturgies that fail to make us more profoundly and compassionately human may be elegant exercises in ritual aesthetics, but they can hardly be called Christian.... What prevents most people from developing a liturgical spirituality is thus not inattention to worship but inattention to human life in all its complex subtlety and convoluted texture.” (Nathan Mitchell)

Our participation in the liturgy is a vital part of our lives as Christians. Through this participation we are gradually transformed into the people God intends us to be. The liturgy is truly the source and summit of our Christian lives.

In the words of the theologian, Paul Ford, Ph.D.: “A lived liturgy is all the spirituality one needs.”