

Liturgy of the Eucharist

The following essay is a summary based on a presentation given by by J. David Kammer at Our Lady Star of the Sea parish in New Smyrna Beach, Florida in early February 2009

WHY SHOULD I GO TO CHURCH?

The Spirituality of the Liturgy of the Eucharist

We Catholics speak of our main communal religious service as the Mass. We are not likely to use the more extended title of "The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass," nor are we likely to use the expression of the very early Christians, "the breaking of the bread." Both John Paul II and Benedict XVI refer to the Mass as the "Eucharistic Celebration" as does the current Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Within the Eucharistic Celebration we find the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Our celebration is a liturgy through which we are fed the Word of God and we commune with divine life. We are fed so that we may give of ourselves. Our Lord gives of himself to nourish us. Simply put, our Mass is a banquet and a sacrifice

Eucharist – Liturgy – Spirituality: We briefly consider key words of our sub-title: The Spirituality of the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Eucharist. We are accustomed to consider Eucharist as the Body of Christ, as the very Person of Christ. However, we hope to realize that in the concept of Eucharist there is a depth of reality; in the Eucharist there is the dynamism of divine life, a life that lives by dying.

What is Liturgy? Webster defines liturgy as a rite prescribed for public worship. Liturgy is an action that is organized with intent of establishing and confirming attitudes and dispositions, especially relational dispositions. In the ecclesial context the liturgy, especially the liturgy of the Eucharist, is the action of and participation in recalling and pondering the examples given to us by God, especially those given us by the Word incarnate; it leads to resolves of cooperation and imitation. The Liturgy of Eucharist, the ritual, the action of Eucharist, is one of awareness and gratitude, along with union and cooperation with the divine giver.

What is "spirituality?" Many people set spirituality over against religion. They may say that they relate to God and live a good life without externals and without church attendance. They say they are spiritual but not religious. However, if they relate to God consciously, interiorly, they are religious, though limited, for the word religion derives from a Latin word meaning "to tie together" or "to relate." Their relationship is limited unless they relate

lovingly with others, with community. And we might consider them limited if they do not relate to the Incarnate God, our Lord Jesus, and take advantage of the means given by Jesus when he said, "Do this in memory of me."

In this essay we are concerned that we who are religious have grown to be as spiritual as God calls us to be. Are we truly conscious and intimate in our prayerful relationship with the Lord? Intimacy need not be emotional! Nor need it go by way of images, though image can be helpful. It is based on a growing awareness of the presence of God.

Time out. We take time out to note that to relate to a person it is best to have an awareness of "presence." We usually have our favorite way of taking cognizance of God's Presence. One very important but often neglected awareness is that of the fact that through Baptism we are temples of the Holy Spirit. The grace of the Spirit touches us with wisdom and with fire. It is the gift of the presence of divine life collaborating with our thoughts; it is divine fire urging us, motivating us.

In scripture we see both the Father and Jesus taking action "by the power of the Spirit." Divine power is divine life; by Baptism and continued cooperation with God divine life abides in us! ! We are not divine, but divine life influences our human life, in fact it acts to be a strong influence on our attitudes; divine life nudges us, motivates us, acts to be a wondrous supporting dynamism for us. Come Lord Jesus with your Spirit so that I may say with St. Paul, "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me."

Our goal: "conscious and active participation"

Within the Eucharistic Celebration we find The Liturgy of the Word in which there is dominance given to instruction for living a good Christian life through listening to the reading of scripture and to the encouragement given by the homilist.

In the scripture readings God tells us about himself and what we should do and not do. The Gospels emphasize the life, example, and teaching of Jesus, how we should imitate Jesus and live a Christian life, what we should do. Less emphasized is the fact that Jesus kept in touch with the Father, went off alone to relate, to pray, to maintain his intimacy with his Father. In his commentary the homilist may easily become more the moralist than the evangelist who seeds a faith in and reliance on the abiding grace of divine presence and divine life.

We try to live a good life and by and large we do. We observe the commandments and the beatitudes; we are kind and charitable to our fellow human beings. We may consider such a life an implicit love of God, and so it may very well be. We might wonder, however, if our motivation is all it might be.

Once again, we might recall the Fiddler on the Roof in which Tevye repeatedly asks his wife if she loves him, as she reminds him of all the chores she does for him. I believe Tevye is probing for intimacy and depth.

We would do well to remember Jesus asking Peter three times if he loves him, even asking him if he loves him "more than these." Is Jesus here asking for more than the action of service to neighbor? At times there is so much emphasis on the follow through in love that we neglect the love.

After the Resurrection our Lord appeared and mingled with his followers, ate and conversed with them; he wanted to be with his people, he wanted community (koinonia), he wanted intimacy.

Christian life supported by the Liturgy of the Eucharist

In October of 2008 Pope Benedict XVI called a representative group of Bishops together for a synod on the theme of the Word of God. One of their recommendations was that homilists and catechists should be cautioned not to imply a disconnection between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist but should take steps to strengthen the relationship between the two. The Christian life we are taught to live in the Liturgy of the Word is prayerfully supported by the Liturgy of the Eucharist. There is a profound connection.

While the Liturgy of the Word tells us what we should do, what our action should be, it is in the Liturgy of the Eucharist we enter into intimate relationship with Jesus and the Father through the life of the Spirit, the "power of the Spirit."

In the Liturgy of the Eucharist we call to mind, we remember, and we react with awe and gratitude. We stop to ponder the divine Presence and we pledge our cooperation and service. It behooves us to understand and appreciate the value of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. We need to be nourished by it as much as we need to be nourished by Holy Communion ... and by the Liturgy of the Word.

Many people who do not recognize a need for the intimacy at the heart of the Mass -- especially if they are "bored with the homily" - - simply do not attend Mass, or they go off elsewhere in search of nourishment and/or entertainment to find better preaching.

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

After the recitation of the Creed the Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the presentation and offering of the gifts of bread and wine, as well as financial help for the expenses of the celebration, of parish and church, and for the poor. "Blessed are you, Lord God;" you are so good in giving us these gifts to offer. These gifts are

important elements of the ritual into which we are entering. We are about to remember. We are about to enter into a memorial.

We begin the Liturgy of the Eucharist attentively and prayerfully. In his exhortation at the end of the Synod of the Eucharist in March of 2007, Pope Benedict XVI said: "The spiritual life of the faithful can benefit greatly from a better appreciation of the richness of the Eucharistic prayer."

We may note how the celebrant prays; at times he prays as designated/ordained leader of the congregation and at times he prays "in persona Christi," that is, in the person of Christ, as Christ. We hear the Son of God speaking to the Father, and we hear our Lord, as one of us, praying to the Father.

When preparations are complete, the celebrant leader calls for our attention. "May the Lord be with you." "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God." We begin what is known as the Preface. As we listen, we are surprised and in awe of the multitude and significant importance of the blessings that are at our disposal.

The celebrant leads us in gratitude to God ...

... for his "being the source of life and light,"

... for "never ceasing to call us to a new and more abundant life,"

... gratitude for "Jesus through whom you made universe and whom you

sent to redeem us," that is, to release and restore.

With wonder and in worship we realize our indebtedness. Earlier Christians were so overwhelmed by awe and gratitude that they exploded audibly with "amazing, wonderful, what goodness" expressed as "sanctus, sanctus, sanctus." We continue the tradition today in our worship and gratitude with "holy, holy, holy ... heaven and earth are full of your glory," full of the manifestation and radiance of your goodness.

Another time out. We take time out from the flow of our essay to mention that the most recent Catechism of the Catholic Church says that the Preface is a "sacrifice of praise" and a "sacrifice of thanksgiving." Those phrases occasion consideration of what we might very well understand by the word sacrifice. Unlike our ingrained attitude that sacrifice is something that hurts, it is better understood as a giving of ourselves. Giving thanks is giving of ourselves but it does not hurt or kill us. Giving attention and recognition to someone does not negate us, but it is giving of ourselves. True, give ourselves does take something out of us. Jesus' giving of himself killed him.

The celebrant picks up the theme of the preface: "Lord, you are holy indeed, the fountain of all holiness." With those words we are led further into the anaphora, the Eucharistic prayer. There are several optional prayers; essential to each is the epiclesis, calling

on the power of the Holy Spirit, "Let your Spirit come upon these gifts to make them holy, so that they may become for us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Pope Benedict XVI: "Eucharistic spirituality is enriched if we contemplate the profound unity between the invocation of the Holy Spirit and the institution narrative." Exhortation (#147) ending the Synod of the Eucharist, March 2007.

With the words of institution we recognize the Divine Presence; we recognize our Lord's willingness to give his body and to be broken for us, we recognize in the shed blood the divine covenantal pledge of everlasting communion with us.

Contemplating the Eucharistic Presence

What thoughts might we have as we ponder and worship the "lifted" Lord? There before us is Jesus, the risen Lord, alive! The Jesus who showed himself in the upper room and again on the shore of Lake Galilee preparing breakfast for his disciples now chooses to show himself to us under transformed bread and wine.

We worship Jesus, alive, risen, conscious ... conscious with attitudes disposed to love, to give of himself no matter the cost, even at the cost of death. The same self-giving love that Jesus manifested throughout his earthly life extends to the cross, is alive before us on the altar, and comes to us in Communion.

In his encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (Church of the Eucharist) John Paul II wrote: "In the Eucharistic Presence the paschal mystery is gathered up and concentrated. There is a mysterious 'oneness in time.'" Thus, we say that the Mass is a re-presentation of the sacrifice of the Cross, and we have heard it said that the Mass is "the unbloody sacrifice of Calvary."

At the awareness of the divine Presence, the Church in Latin gasps "Mysterium Fidei!" (Mystery of Faith). Mystery that our Lord so loves us as to die for us ... yet has been raised by the Father and is alive. The mystery is a revelation that we live by dying!

Mysterium Fidei is translated for us blandly in English: "Let us proclaim the mystery of faith." And we reply with the words of our memory: "Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again." By the power of the Spirit the Kingdom will come!

Serving in Christ

Time out: What does it mean to be "in Christ?"

We are in awe and are inspired to be confident and to love and serve in return. The celebrant leads us on with: "We thank you for allowing us to stand in your presence and serve you." We sense that there is a shift from a prayer of contemplation to a prayer of action, a shift to a disposition of self-giving, a disposition of sacrifice on our part. Pope Benedict has said that at the Holy Sacrifice "we enter into the very dynamic of self-giving."

A theme of communion in service prevails to the end of Mass when, nourished and fortified by the Eucharistic banquet, we hear: "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord."

Meanwhile, we pray for unity, again with an epiclesis calling on the power of divine life: "May we be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit." May we serve harmoniously together with the help of divine life. "May we become one body, one spirit in Christ." We want to serve "through Him and with Him and in Him."

After the Great Amen, the great affirmation that we live and serve together as one in Christ, we focus on the goal of Christian living; it is the Kingdom! "Our Father ... thy Kingdom come ..." Our cooperation with divine life will lead to the fulfillment of God's plan, to our eternal happiness, and to the completion of all of creation in Christ ... through whom all things were originally made! Christ will come again! The Kingdom will come!

We go to the table of the Lord for the banquet of nourishment and support for our journey of union and service, support for living the Christian way of life advocated by the scripture and the homily of the Liturgy of the Word.

Hopefully we are now in a position to see the value of the Mass and of the Eucharistic prayer in particular; we are in a better position to appreciate our need of getting apart from the crowd and from the activity of everyday life to be better motivated in following the Liturgy of the Word through which we are instructed on how to live a good Christian life. We not only know what to do; we are imbedded in the power of the Spirit with Christ.

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