

What is the Sacred Liturgy?

The Sacred Liturgy of the Catholic Church is the Mystery of Redemption and Salvation in Jesus Christ. That Mystery has been entrusted to the Church in order to make it known at every moment and in every place on earth. The Sacred Liturgy, then, is a supernatural reality that transcends time and space. The Sacred Liturgy, therefore, is to be received by every Catholic as a divine gift from God. In other words, no individual person or group of people can “make” the Sacred Liturgy. Quite the opposite, Sacred Liturgy, if participated in freely and properly, transforms those who are gathered together by the Church as a liturgical assembly.

The Fathers of Vatican Council II defined and described the nature of Liturgy in “*The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*”:

Liturgy is considered as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. In the liturgy the sanctification of man, under the guise of signs perceptible to the senses, is accomplished in a way which corresponds with each of these signs. In the liturgy, full 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 Catholic 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.

(Sacrosanctum Concilium, no. 7).

The Sacred Liturgy has its own divine nature. Indeed, Sacred Liturgy is Jesus Christ, the Eternal High Priest, and all those united to and united with him. It is our Lord, and him alone, who gives perfect praise and worship to God the Father, through the Holy Spirit.

The Sacred Liturgy, therefore, is not a closed human circle in which people decide to meet, and, perhaps, to encourage one another. Sacred Liturgy is a summons to the New People of God to be in the presence and worship of the Communitarian God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is the coming of the Triune God among us; it is the Trinitarian God encountering and acting upon every member of the liturgical assembly. God pours out his Divine Life and Love to the creature, in order for the creature to be drawn up to God, “in spirit and Truth” (Jn. 4:23).

Truly, Sacred Liturgy is much more than the efforts of human beings, however well intentioned they are. Liturgy is *opus Dei*, that is, the work of God, offering to every

member of the liturgical assembly a deepening of the divinized life received in baptism.

Sacred Liturgy is divine worship, that is, adoration of God the Father, through the Eternal Priesthood of Jesus the Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Mass then, in and of itself, is the supreme act of the Catholic Church. The Mass is about personal union and communion with God through the sharing in the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. It allows the grace of God to transform and renew one's entire inner being.

Thus, every action in the Sacred Liturgy, especially in the Mass, should lead to an adoration of God. Only then can an authentic fraternal communion be realized; a place where supernatural charity can be in operation. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his first encyclical, *Deus caritas est*,

Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself. I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or will become, his own. Communion draws me out of myself towards Him, and thus also towards unity with all Christians.

(*Deus caritas est*, no.14)

It can be said, therefore, that only in the Person of Jesus Christ, the Eternal High Priest, is the perfect achievement of humanity's reconciliation with God the Father and the unification of all people in heaven and on earth continues to be accomplished through the celebration of the Paschal Mystery at Mass.

On this point the "*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*" teaches:

The liturgy daily builds up those who are in the Church, making of them a holy temple of the Lord, a dwelling place for God in the Spirit, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ. At the same time, it marvelously increases their power to preach Christ and, thus, show forth the Church, a sign lifted up among the nations, to those who are outside, a sign under which the scattered children of God may be gathered together until there is one fold and one shepherd.

(Sacrosanctum Concilium, no.2)

In a profound sense, the Mass celebrates the joining together of two distinct realities: the divine and the human, the supernatural and the natural, the sacred and the secular, a merciful God and a fallen humanity.

The Sacred Liturgy, but most especially the Mass, is the great work of Jesus Christ and his Catholic Church by which God, the Father, is glorified and mankind is sanctified perfectly.