

REFLECTING ON THE SYNOD RECOMMENDATIONS (11)

Sunday Liturgy and Other Sacraments

Liturgy is what we do as Church

How vital is liturgy to us as Catholics? In a word, it's our lifeblood. It's our daily bread. I mean, you could fill our schools and our bank accounts to the bursting point. You could have a large staff, everyone with a post-graduate degree in theology, and all the volunteers for which you've ever dreamed. But if we didn't have the Word and the Eucharist, what would we be? On the other hand, you could burn down our buildings, empty our bank accounts, and martyr the staff (This has happened to us in the past!), but if we still had the Eucharist, we would be in Christ and we'd still be Catholic.

Eucharist and Baptism

Recognizing that liturgy is vital for us Catholics, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council among all the goals and demands on their schedule turned first to consider the liturgy. Let's let the bishops and pope speak for themselves through the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy which was promulgated on December 4, 1963. Here in this paraphrase of article 6 the bishops remind us that we have been celebrating the liturgy since the time of Jesus:

"God gave those first disciples everything they would need to remain fully attentive to the mystery that they had experienced during Jesus' lifetime. Thus, did they baptize those who came to believe in Jesus and in the saving power of his life and death. Thus, too, did they share the Eucharist, the full celebration of the presence of Jesus. It was both in their loving actions and their worship that the first disciples came to know their profound call to "be Church." From that very first day until now we have never stopped announcing the Word, baptizing those who believe, and celebrating the Eucharist."

The four-fold presence of Christ at Mass

And in this paraphrase of article 7 the bishops proclaim the four-fold presence of Christ in the Mass. Celebrating liturgy, they tell us, is the most important act we humans undertake: "We have lost nothing for not having lived during the time of Jesus' life on earth. We have everything that the first disciples had to help us believe in Jesus and live as though this faith makes a difference! Jesus is always present in the Church. This presence is most noticeable in our liturgical celebrations. In the Mass, Jesus is present in the ministers of the Church, in the Eucharistic bread and wine, in the proclaimed Word of God, and in the whole community gathered in song and prayer. Jesus is also present in a unique way in all the other sacraments. Because of Christ's assured presence, the liturgy gives us the unique opportunity to enter fully and honestly into our most authentic relationship with God. Hence, the liturgy is the most sacred act of human life. There is nothing more significant that we ever do".

Source and summit of our lives

Turning now to a paraphrase of articles 10 and 11 we learn that the liturgy is the source and summit of the Christian life. Calling the liturgy our source and summit means that our whole Christian life flows from the Mass and also returns to it every week. Here's what the bishops said:

"Nevertheless, the liturgy is the summit toward which the Christian life is directed and the very source of that life to begin with. It is a fount from which grace is poured over us, and it is that place to which we go for reconciliation, peace, and communion. Among all liturgical celebrations, the Eucharist, of course, holds a special prominence. In the Eucharist, the eternal covenant between God and humankind is renewed, and Jesus' love is rekindled in us. Precisely because it is so central to us, and so crucial in the Christian journey, the faithful who come to liturgy must be well disposed, ready to participate, and actively engaged in the rites. It is not enough simply to follow the letter of the law, making sure that our liturgies are "correct" and "proper." Much more is required of those who practice liturgical leadership: they also have to ensure that participants have the opportunity to take part fully, to understand what they are doing, and to be enriched by its effects."

Also, in this quote from article 14, we see the operating principle which the bishops followed in the reform: "Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, [and] a redeemed people" is their right and duty by reason of their baptism. In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full, conscious and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else".

They went on to say that they realise that if the ideal of full, conscious and active participation by all people is ever to be achieved, then liturgical leaders, particularly parish priests, must be absolutely and internally convinced of the spirit and power of the liturgy so they can pass on such fervour to all the faithful entrusted to their ministry.

Reconciliation

Of course, Baptism and Eucharist do not stand alone among the sacraments of the Church. The Council also reformed Reconciliation, Confirmation, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony.

Synod members are eager to encourage the celebration of Reconciliation in the Archdiocese. We see in this paraphrase of article 72 how the Council Fathers chose to reform this essential sacrament: "The rite and formula for the sacrament of penance are to be revised to better emphasise the nature of the sacrament with its focus on the mercy of God."

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REFLECTING ON THE SYNOD RECOMMENDATIONS (12)

Catholic Social Teaching and Creation Care

Catholic Social Teaching

One of the tools we have with which to approach the thorny social challenges of our day and age is the strong tradition of Catholic social teaching. We summarise this teaching in seven important principles. Here they are in summary form:

1. We Catholics affirm the life and dignity of the human person. The prophet Jeremiah recalls God's message to us: "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you." (Jeremiah 1:5) We believe every God created every human person in the divine image and likeness. God is present in everyone regardless of religion, culture, nationality, orientation or economic standing.

2. We Catholics affirm that we must maintain the common good of all. The common good means that the fruits of the earth belong to everyone and must be shared fairly. Impoverished people are crying out for help to a world where there are people with more than enough. The Church is directly asking us to help. We waste food and fail to curb our consumption even when we know that people are starving. This principle calls us to a new balance in consumerism and a new heart for the poor.

3. We Catholics are dedicated to the cause of peace on earth. In 1963 Pope John XXIII sent a critical letter to the world entitled *Pacem in Terris* in Latin or *Peace on Earth* in English. Peace is a cornerstone of our faith, he taught. Christ is the Prince of Peace who showed self-giving love as he went to the cross and there, on that cross, he forgave his killers. We, too, are called to be peacemakers, in our homes and among our neighbours, in our communities and our nation, and among the nations of the world. Such peace begins within our hearts, he taught, when we follow the way of Jesus.

4. We Catholics choose the option for the poor and vulnerable. Throughout his ministry, Jesus chose the poor and when he describes in Matthew 25 what the final judgement will be like we learn that it won't be about how holy we thought we were, or how fully we followed the rules, or even about how often we prayed. It will be all about the poor: "Whatever you did to the least of my sisters and brothers, you did to me," he reminds us. Catholic teaching proclaims that a basic moral test is how we treat our most vulnerable neighbours.

5. We Catholics affirm the dignity of work and the rights of workers. We believe that the economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it's a form of continuing participation in God's creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then we must defend the fundamental rights of workers: the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to organise and join unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.

6. We Catholics believe in family, community, and participation. This principle is about how we organise our society. We believe that the "household of faith" or "domestic church" in which a family is established and grows is fundamental. Solidarity with each other arises when we remember that we belong to each other, and it is the building block of community. Likewise, we applaud all who participate in the public life of the community and the parish.

7. We Catholics care for God's creation. Pope Francis brought together decades of Church teaching in the encyclical, *On the Care of our Common Home* ('*Laudato Si'* in Latin). He invites everyone on the planet to consider how our actions are affecting the earth and its poorest people. Everything is interconnected, he teaches, and all of creation praises God. It is our Christian vocation to care for creation. And this leads us to another strong Synod outcome: how to study and implement a programme of creation care.

Creation Care

Standing in a long line of popes and others from many faiths, Pope Francis began *Laudato Si* by reminding everyone that we must be attentive to life on the planet as part of our faith commitment. It's faith—not politics—that drives creation care. Then, quoting the Patriarch Bartholomew, the spiritual leader of the Eastern Orthodox Church, he calls on us to take personal action as we see in this paraphrase of articles 8-9:

"Patriarch Bartholomew has called on each of us to take small, personal actions to care for the planet, reversing our small ways of harming her. We have sinned against Creation, he teaches firmly.

"To commit a crime against the natural world," he teaches, "is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God."

Bartholomew has gone even farther. He calls us to a deep change within our hearts, to "replace consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing." We should see the world as a "sacrament" he tells us, a way of sharing life with God and our neighbours. We meet on the earth, and we humans are drawn from her dust."

We hear in this and throughout the encyclical that the Church calls us to personal action as well as corporate plans and decisions. And then Pope Francis suggests a way forward as we see in this paraphrase of article 14: "My urgent appeal is for dialogue. Let's tackle this together! There is a worldwide ecological movement, but powerful forces oppose it while most people simply go their merry way and ignore the problem, as though it will go away on its own. Others have come to believe that we can do nothing to repair the ecological damage we see. And still others think that all we need is more technology and development, as though adding to the problem will fix it. What I believe we need is new and worldwide solidarity of will and talent to care for God's creation."

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