

Liturgical Spirituality

"In order that the Christian people may more certainly derive an abundance of graces from the sacred liturgy, holy Mother Church desires to undertake with great care a general restoration of the liturgy itself. For the liturgy is made up of unchangeable elements divinely instituted, and of elements subject to change. These latter not only may be changed but ought to be changed with the passage of time, if they have suffered from the intrusion of anything out of harmony with the inner nature of the liturgy or have become less suitable. In this restoration both texts and rites should be drawn up so as to express more clearly the holy things which they signify. The Christian people, as far as is possible, should be able to understand them with ease and take part in them fully, actively, and as a community" The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #21.

Forming and ReForming

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Historical Perspective

An era of liturgical reform often forgotten is the period from the Council of Trent (1563) to the advent of the Second Vatican Council (1963). The modern liturgical movement that had its beginnings in the mid-nineteenth century continued for decades before the Vatican II Council. This reform movement in our time is over one hundred and fifty years old. While the early liturgical movement began as a romantic recovery of past traditions, this renewal has become the impetus for the Church to engage the world in the modern times as a sign of the reign of God. It has also led to a renewal of Christian faith and a renewed interest in unity among Christians.

Liturgy never stands still, no matter how unchanging the liturgical books may be. However, Vatican Council II was the force for a renewed, intensive and extensive study of the history of liturgy and prayer because the Council asked the Church to recover its historical sources. The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (#16, 23) states that historical study is to be an integrated guide for religious life, pastoral ministries and therefore liturgical reform. Thus, the Second Vatican Council did more than change the liturgical books; it restored the liturgy to the center of the life of the Church as the source and summit of the Christian life. In doing so, it also sought to return to the assembly their proper liturgical role as ministers with full, active, and conscious participation in the Church and her liturgy.

Sacramentality of Each Liturgical Season

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up
what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down,
and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to

mourn, and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8 [nrsv].



A historical analysis of liturgical time would yield interesting facts but the principal issue facing the early church was the fading from the Church’s consciousness the eschatological emphasis to a Church that was reconciled to and comfortable in time. Dom Gregory Dix claims “the pliable idea of anamnesis was there to ease the transition.”

Chauvet writes: “Creation is charged with sacramentality.”^[2] Since all sacramentality meets at the intersection of historic and cosmic, then all time is sacred. Kenan Osborne develops his sacramental

theology upon Chauvet’s. For Osborne, Jesus as human is primordial sacrament and the Church is foundational sacrament.^[3] Therefore, each year and every liturgical season must also have a sacramentality. The Church marks time through a year of grace, which preserves and hands down the central mysteries of the faith, day after day, week after week, season after season, and year after year. Each year is made new in the Spirit, each season is fulfilled in creation, each week takes on new meaning, each day is the Lord’s day. Thomas J. Talley has noted that while the Gospels might have been crafted so that they would have been proclaimed over a period of time, he adds that the period of time “shaped by those narrative and by the response of Christian life to their proclamation is the liturgical year.”^[4] While the Second Vatican Council was in session, Thomas Merton published a book of meditations on the cycle of liturgical feasts entitled *Seasons of Celebration*. However, the liturgical year is more than a series of celebrations; it is catechesis and a pedagogical anamnesis of the paschal mystery.

A celebration of religious tradition through stories shared and bread broken is illustrated in the Jewish celebration of Passover, when the youngest child asks at the beginning of the evening, “Why is this night different from all the other nights?” The answer eventually comes from the eldest, “Now we begin to answer. Our history moves from slavery toward freedom... Our service opens with the rule of evil and advanced toward the kingdom of God.”^[5] For generations the stories of deliverance from bondage to freedom are kept alive. Jesus instituted the Eucharist at such a ritual meal. When Christians gather in Christ’s name to fulfill his injunction to “do this in remembrance of me” (*1 Corinthians 11:24b & 11:25b*) by giving thanks, blessing and breaking the bread, sharing the cup. “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (*1 Corinthians 11:26*). Within the cycle of the liturgical year the paschal mystery is relived over and over again through the various seasons of Advent, Christmas, Ordinary Time I, Lent, The Triduum, Easter, Pentecost, and Ordinary

Time II. The God of History in the Spirit of Christ builds up the kingdom through seasons at the intersection of *kairos* and *chronos*.

The fathers of the Second Vatican Council beautifully captured the essence of the seasons of celebration in which time is transformed:

"Holy Mother Church believes that it is for her to celebrate the saving work of her divine Spouse in a sacred commemoration on certain days throughout the course of the year. Once each week, on the day which she has called the Lord's day, she keeps the memory of the Lord's resurrection. She also celebrates it once every year, together with his blessed passion, at Easter, that most solemn of all feasts.

"In the course of the year, moreover, she unfolds the whole mystery of Christ from the incarnation and nativity to the ascension, to Pentecost and the expectation of the blessed hope of the coming of the Lord.

"Thus recalling the mysteries of the redemption, she opens up to the faithful the riches of her Lord's powers and merits, so that these are in some way made present for all time; the faithful lay hold of them and are filled with saving grace."

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #102



With this understanding of the sanctification of time in the presence of the now and not yet of the kingdom, the General Intercessions take on an obligation to speak to the seasons and the mysteries they are meant to transmit. Advent is a time of spiritual preparation for Christ's coming and the joyful expectation of Christ's second coming. Christmas through Epiphany celebrates Christ's birth and his early manifestations with Epiphany communicating the mystery of the incarnation. Lent prepares the catechumens in stages for the celebration of the paschal mystery as it also prepares the assembly for Easter. Easter, the Paschal Mystery, the heart of Christian faith is centered in the Sacred Triduum: one celebration spread over three days, which relives the mystery of Jesus' saving actions from his last

supper on Holy Thursday through his passion and death to his rising on the third day, as Lord of all. Easter is an extended celebration of joy and gratitude arising from the marvelous work God has done in Christ. The fifty days between Easter and Pentecost is celebrated as one feast, the Great Sunday, commemorating Christ's passing through death to glory with the promise of our own passing over to share in Christ's new life in God. Easter is filled with themes and images expressing joy in Christ's resurrection and ascension to glory. The entire fifty-day celebration leads the whole Church into a more intense realization of the great goodness of God, shown in the risen Christ. Pentecost

recalls the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as recorded in Acts, upon the disciples as the visible sign of the reality of God's gift of the Spirit to all believers. Ordinary Time includes the Sundays apart from the other seasons and celebrated as the Lord's Day in the fullness of the Paschal Mystery.^[6] It unfolds the mystery thought the life and ministry of Christ proclaimed. Every Sunday is an Easter remembrance and every liturgy is a paschal event.

There are three solemnities of the Lord that are celebrated within Ordinary Time: Trinity Sunday, Body and Blood of Christ (*Corpus Christi*), and the Sacred Heart. The sacramentality of the liturgical seasons is celebrated in three sequences: Incarnation, Paschal, and Sundays. The beginning of the Liturgical year and lectionary are narratives of the beginning of Jesus' life and ministry and unfolds throughout the year to the apex of the passion, death, and resurrection stories. The year and lectionary further develop the paschal mystery as it moves toward the end times pointing to the eschaton. Thus the seasons of celebration and the lectionary are held in tension.

[1] See Dom Gregory Dix's chapter on "The Sanctification of Time" in *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1945), Chapter XI, 303-396.

[2] Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 551.

[3] Kenan B. Osborne, *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 52.

[4] Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 235.

[5] Herbert Bronstein, ed., *A Passover Haggadah* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1974), 29.

[6] See Joseph M. Champlin's more complete discussion of "The Church's Year of Grace" in *Messenger's of God's Word: A Handbook for Lectors* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 67-86.

The quote from Vatican Council II Sacrosanctum Concilium is necessary to note in its entirety: "In order that sound tradition be retained, and yet the way remain open to legitimate progress, a careful investigation—theological, historical, and pastoral—should always be made into each part of the liturgy which is to be revised. Furthermore the general laws governing the structure and meaning of the liturgy must be studied in conjunction with the experience derived from recent liturgical reforms and from the indults granted to various places (#23)."

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