

DOCTRINE CORNER

INTRODUCTION:

The way we participate in the liturgical celebrations in our Parish, tells us many persons do not yet know what the Liturgy of the Catholic Church is all about. In this write up, we start to explain what the Liturgy is all about and what are its characteristics. After this explanation, we shall examine our Liturgy here vis a vis our Liturgical celebrations here in Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral.

WHAT IS THE LITURGY:

The word Liturgy etymologically comes from the Greek classical language; from the Greek word "Leitourgia" which is a combination of the adjective 'leitos' meaning people or national community and 'ergon' meaning work. It means a service done for the common welfare of the people. So, Liturgy is work or service pertaining to the people or national community. For the Greeks it was a service done for the people at personal cost or at least without payment. Even forced labor referred to this type of service. The word finally made its way into revealed literature through the Septuagint translation of the Bible (Greek Bible of OT) – the translation of the 3rd Century BC of the Hebrew Bible for Greek Speaking Jews). The translation used it primarily for the Jewish people's prime purpose – the worship of Yahweh. Even the Jews used it for a service done for the state, although less frequently, since the state was a theocratic one (that is God centered).

The New Testament writers used this word Liturgy more or less according to the way the translators translated it in the Old Testament. St. Luke talks of Zechariah's liturgy (Luke 1: 5-25). St. Paul speaks of himself as the liturgist of Christ (Romans 15.16). In Hebrews 8:1-6, the author speaks of the priestly ministry of Christ as Liturgy. Christ is not only the founder of the Church and her Liturgy, he is the foremost priest. Liturgy is used here exclusively in the Christian sense. We are sharers in Christ's priesthood. So, the full, conscious, and active participation is demanded from the Christian people, since it is their right because of their baptism to participate in the Liturgy. Thus Liturgy is the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, which the Christian people share in by their participation in it. It is the work of the Christian people who perform this act in order to obtain the fruits Christ won for them by his redemptive work.

Defining Liturgy according to some other characteristics, we can say that 'Liturgy' is a personal meeting under the veil of Holy Signs, of God and his Church, and with the total person of each one of her members in and through Christ and in the unity of the Holy spirit. Liturgy in this regard has some specific characteristics; it emphasizes the theocratic nature (God centered) of the Liturgy; It is a personal meeting with God. This takes place in and through Christ – thus the Christo-centric character of the Church's Liturgy. This does not take place directly, but under the veil of Holy Signs. It does not only involve one person, but the whole congregation, hence, the Ecclesial aspect of the Church's Liturgy. It also involves the whole person, body, and soul (gestures, ideas, words etc.).

Liturgy effects the Sanctification of man and the Glorification of God. Since Liturgy is worship, it has per se a 'latenter' purpose; that is, the individual and social duty of glorifying God. It attains its purpose being Christian Worship, by virtue of the priestly action of Jesus Christ. Christ's Sacrifice, the mass constitutes therefore, the Center of the Liturgy; more than that its essential act. Hence in the Eastern Liturgies, the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice is called simply Liturgy.

Participation also in this primary character of the Sacrifice and the divine Office, which has the aim of extending to the whole day, in a mystical way the essential Glorification offered to God in the Mass; and also, those sacraments and sacramentals which have been instituted to make the celebration of Mass possible or more worthy and which imitate the essence of the sacrifice, namely the consecration of creatures to God. We refer here to the various consecrations or constitutive blessings through which persons or things are dedicated to God in relation to the sacrifice; the various ministerial orders, the consecration or blessing of Churches, altars, sacred vessels and ornaments etc.

Summarily, Liturgy has seven properties; Liturgy first and foremost is Christian; that is, it is an act undertaken by those who have been baptized and is their right to offer acceptable sacrifice to God through Jesus Christ. Liturgy is hierarchical; that is, not everybody performs every function at the same time. Functions are shared out and to undertake a certain function worthily you must be baptized.

Certain functions are reserved to those who have received sacred ordination. Liturgy is traditional and at the same time pastoral. This means that liturgy contains truths that have been handed down to us, but at the same time liturgy must be made to suit those who partake in the liturgical act. If they are children, it should suit the children and if it is with old men and women, it should suit their way of life. Liturgy sanctifies; this means that the Christian people who take part in the Liturgy are made holy. They receive graces due to their participation in the Liturgical services. Liturgy is didactic; this means that it teaches people; like when a homily is delivered; through the scriptural texts read during the liturgical services, the participants are instructed about revealed truth and are advised to model their lives according to what is told them. Liturgy finally is social; it is a gathering of two or more persons and the social dimension of it cannot be overlooked. Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy summarizes the understanding of Liturgy as follows;

"... It is the Liturgy through which especially in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, 'the work of our redemption is accomplished', and it is through the Liturgy, especially, that the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church... 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.

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