

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

Study Guide, Part 2

THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CONSTITUTION ON THE SACRED LITURGY

Can a Church Document Have a Spirituality?

When considering some of the Church's solemn statements from the Second Vatican Council, such as the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, one soon discovers that spirituality plays a significant role. The *Constitution* gives evidence of its authors' spiritual interests, commitments, and concerns. The document also shows—perhaps even more importantly—that a certain spirituality must be developed by the faithful in order to step into the world the document describes and to embrace the agenda it advances.

The first instruction issued after the *Constitution*, “For the Right Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy” (*Inter Oecumenici*, 1964), makes clear that spiritual formation is essential to the agenda of the *Constitution*. “Necessary before all else. . . is the shared conviction that the Constitution on the Liturgy has as its objective not simply to change liturgical forms and texts but rather to bring to life the kind of formation of the faithful and ministry of pastors that will have their summit and source in the liturgy” (*Inter Oecumenici*, 5; see CSL, 10).

A spirituality keyed to the demands and assertions of the *Constitution* would contain many elements. In this session, we will cover several of them:

- ▶ a vital relationship with Christ and his Paschal Mystery
- ▶ a commitment to active participation in the liturgy
- ▶ love for Sacred Scripture
- ▶ respect for the diverse cultural circumstances and genius of the peoples of the world

For Discussion

- ▶ Think of the word *prayer*. What image comes to mind? Now think of the word *spirituality*. What image comes to mind? Are the two different? In what ways?

CHRIST AND HIS PASCHAL MYSTERY

While riding a city bus one day, I noticed a young man flirting with a young woman. The way he leaned toward her now and again, and the way her eyes looked into his and looked away,

shyly, spoke volumes. The romantic in me said, “How sweet! They’re so young and full of promise.” The anthropologist in me said, “Ah, courtship behavior. Typical.” But the theologian in me said, “Suppose it turns out that he really loves her. Suppose she comes to really love him. Suppose a relationship blossoms and they actually spend their lives together. This could become a Paschal story.” After all, there is no true love worthy of the name that does not ask us in some way to die to self, so as to receive new life in abundance.

For Discussion

- ▶ When have you put aside your own desires or ambitions, or stepped outside of your comfort zone, in order to devote yourself to the service of God or another person?

When Pope John Paul II said, “the Liturgy has as its first task to lead us untiringly back to the Easter pilgrimage initiated by Christ, in which we accept death in order to enter into life” (*Vicesimus Quintus Annus*, 6; 1988), he did so on good authority. The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* is deeply imbued with a Christocentric spirituality grounded in the Paschal Mystery. Christ's Paschal sacrifice, his Body broken and Blood poured out for the life of the world, stands at the absolute center of the liturgical event.

Again and again, the document invokes the Paschal Mystery (CSL, 5, 6, 10, 61, 81, 102, 104, 106, 107, 109). Its importance is unmistakable. This does not in any way deny the Trinitarian quality of Catholic worship, much less diminish our engagement with the other mysteries of Christ's life. But it sets our priorities straight, and it does so in a way that honors Western tradition and is deeply consistent with our Catholic liturgical history. The worship of God, the role of the Spirit, the Trinitarian quality of the liturgy—all are true. But Christ is at the center and his Paschal Mystery is the heart of what we celebrate. If asked to locate the primary spiritual “lens” through which the document views our worship, it would be the Paschal Mystery.

What are the implications of a Paschal spirituality?



**CONSTITUTION ON
THE SACRED LITURGY**
50 YEARS
LITURGY TRAINING PUBLICATIONS

First, it means that salvation in Christ is an event that transforms us. It is dynamic. We participate in the Paschal event by remaining open to change and continuing conversion. Second, a Paschal spirituality invites us to replicate the pattern of Christ's self-giving sacrifice, consciously and deliberately. "If, then, we have died with Christ, raised from the dead, we believe that we shall also live with him" (Romans 6:8). A Paschal spirituality is ordered toward self-giving love that is lavish and does not count the cost. "If any wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Finally, by embracing the Paschal Mystery, we begin to understand and engage with the logic of the liturgical year, which relishes Sunday as the day of the Resurrection, and reaches its high point at Easter (CSL, 102, 106, 107).

The truth of Christ's Paschal Mystery is present in all of our life passages, if only we perceive it. Catechumens experience this truth on their journey to the waters of Baptism. The tears of reconciled sinners confirm it. And in the Eucharist, we celebrate it—richly, fully, and beautifully. Make no mistake. The dying and rising of Jesus Christ is not merely another episode in salvation history, for which we should be grateful. It is the axis on which the world turns. It is our salvation, our glory, the reason why we gather (CSL, 6), and our challenge as we go forth.

For Discussion

- ▶ Do you feel that you are on a "pilgrimage to Easter" in life? What does the Paschal Mystery mean to you personally?
- ▶ Do you feel that you remain open to change and conversion in your life? In what ways, and through what means, does God call you to change?

PARTICIPATION AND THE TRUE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

It's a typical Sunday. I come to the door of my parish church for Sunday Mass, and am met by Gloria, a petite older woman, one of our parish greeters. She is wearing a fabulous magenta-colored hat and beautiful outfit to match. She gives me a hymnal, a bulletin, and a kiss. As I make my way to a place in the church, several other parishioners acknowledge me with a smile, a nod, a wave. I see our director of religious education who does so much for the children and families of the parish, and say hello to the woman who is a regular with the parish outreach and food pantry. I see some new faces in the assembly, too. Our cantor invites us to sing. We stand and open our hymnals and pour out our hearts in song. A stately procession enters. The priest makes the Sign of the Cross. . . . It's Sunday Mass. It belongs to everyone. Nobody is irrelevant. Nobody is unimportant. Everybody is part of the action.

For Discussion

- ▶ What things make you feel welcomed when you come to Mass on Sunday?
- ▶ How do you feel that you are part of the action at Mass?

The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* urges that the faithful should be present at the celebration of the sacred mysteries not as "strangers or silent spectators" (CSL, 48), but should "take part in them fully, actively, and as befits a community" (CSL, 21). There is a spirituality embodied in this vision, one that values and holds fast to the idea that, in the liturgy, we discover ourselves as the People of God, the Church, in all its glory (CSL, 2). "Liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations belonging to the Church . . ." (CSL, 26). Even when the gathering is small, it is the Church that prays. Each individual is part of something greater than him or herself.

The *Constitution* enhanced participation by restoring liturgical ministries to laypersons in their own right (CSL, 28, 29). Its overall vision of the worshipping community is one of an ordered, organic, unified Body (CSL, 26, 41). Each participant comes with a definite role and gift. All cooperate in the praise of God. Our brothers and sisters are not a distraction from true worship, but are our partners in making it happen.

A spirituality of participation permeates the *Constitution*. Everyone is expected to join in the songs, words, and actions that are properly theirs. The inward, spiritual dimensions of participation are also acknowledged and affirmed. More than once the document states that the faithful's "minds be attuned to their voices" (CSL, 11, 90). Above all, the action in which everyone participates is Christ's action at the altar, his self-gift, the perfect offering. The people offer the sacrifice "not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him" (CSL, 48). It is a high calling.

What are the implications of a spirituality of participation? First of all, it requires everyone to shoulder responsibility for the prayer, worship, and discipleship that make up a community of faith. It is no longer "Father's Mass" in which everything is done for us. Participation also means valuing the communal dimension of faith and appreciating the ways we depend on one another. We need each other. Life is not so arranged that anyone can "do it all" for him or herself. A spirituality of participation encourages us to see our interdependence—in liturgy and in life—as a gift. "As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12). This is the Church, the Body of Christ. As we participate in the liturgy, so too are we called to participate in the mission of Christ that goes out to the world (CSL, 2).

For Discussion

- ▶ What difference is there between the experience of attending a Mass where the members of the assembly are paying attention to the liturgy and responding fully in prayer and song, versus attending a Mass where the members of the assembly are withdrawn or distracted?
- ▶ What attitudes toward participation do you observe in your parish at Sunday Mass?
- ▶ Rate your own level of participation. How has it changed over the years, and why?

A WARM AND LIVING LOVE FOR SCRIPTURE

More than ten years ago, a friend of mine, Barry, started the practice of reading the Bible every morning and evening, a chapter at a time: the New Testament in the morning, the Old Testament at night. He reads, prays, and journals. Barry works in retail trade and deals with the public daily, sometimes in chaotic circumstances. "I can be dead tired at the end of the day," he says, "but I'll still pick up my Bible." It's a discipline, but it has been a joy as well. "Sometimes a word or phrase will just jump out at me," he says, "and it seems like something the Lord wants me to hear." He has worked his way through the whole Bible, bit by bit, several times over. Barry is also a faithful daily Mass-goer and a lector at his parish. When he hears the readings at Mass, there's the excitement of recognition. "Oh, that's the passage where Paul says . . ." or "This is that wonderful story from"

For Discussion

- ▶ Have you ever made reading from Scripture part of your daily life? If so, what impact did it have?
- ▶ Name a story or phrase from Scripture that really speaks to you. What significance does it hold for you?

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council directed that "the treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly" (CSL, 51). They wanted the liturgy to provide "richer fare" for the faithful "in God's word" (CSL, 51). The reform they asked for was to promote "a warm and living love for scripture" (CSL, 24) and to be imbued with deep reverence for the Word of God. Christ is truly present in the Word, as well as in the sacrament of the altar (CSL, 7). Thus, the spirituality of the *Constitution* includes, importantly, a passion for Scripture.

Such a passion arises from the confidence that Scripture is a living Word that nourishes the people of God. The *Constitution* includes a call for the renewal of preaching, too (CSL, 35.2, 52), so that the Scriptures would be interpreted and their formative power made evident. The call for more Scripture reading in the liturgy (CSL, 35.1) and even

for "bible services," celebrations of the Word outside of Mass (CSL, 35.4), complemented the mandate of the Council for serious academic Scripture study and the use of Scripture as a guide to the spiritual life.

A spirituality of the Word allows the sacred text to speak in its proper language. By paying careful attention to the literary form, the cultural context, the author's intention, and the Church's tradition of interpretation, the faithful come to a sound appreciation of the Scripture's meaning. The *Constitution's* affirmation of the important role of Scripture also furthers the Council's goal of ecumenism and the healing of historic divisions among Christians (see CSL, 1). But indeed, the bottom line is love for the Scriptures, love for God's Word.

For Discussion

- ▶ What habits, practices, or skills help you to listen well to Scripture at liturgy?
- ▶ Describe your relationship to the Bible. What has influenced that relationship the most?

RESPECT FOR HUMAN CULTURES

In 2007, I stayed with my brother-in-law's family in the West African city of Dakar, Senegal, for almost a month. I attended Mass at two parishes, the cathedral, and nearby Keur Moussa Benedictine Abbey. In each liturgy, the people and choirs together sang Latin chant, French hymns by the pastoral theologian and musician Lucien Deiss, CSSP, and belt-voice chorales accompanied by West African drums and other instruments and sung in local African dialects. It was amazing to see how many different aspects of Catholic culture, past and present, were represented in these liturgies. (Story contributed by Kyle Lechtenberg.)

- ▶ Have you ever attended a Catholic Mass in another country, or that included elements that reflected an ethnic culture that was not your own? What was that experience like?
- ▶ Have you ever attended a Catholic Mass that included elements taken from your own ethnic heritage? What was that experience like?

In the summer of 1959, Pope John XXIII, speaking at the Second World Congress of Negro Writers and Artists, voiced a powerful affirmation of the worthiness of all peoples of the world. Each contributes a unique genius to the life of the Church, for the glory of God: "The Church, however, which is so full of youthful vigor and is constantly renewed by the breath of the Holy Spirit, is willing, at all times, to recognize, welcome, and even assimilate anything that redounds to the honor of the human mind and heart, whether or not it originates in parts of the world washed by the Mediterranean Sea." A respect for human cultures, in all

their rich diversity, found expression in the Council's document on the liturgy in the call to cultural adaptation, or *inculturation*.

The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* makes provision for the adaptation of the Church's liturgical rites to reflect the genius of various human cultures of the world (CSL, 37-40). The liturgy need not look the same everywhere, as long as the substantial unity of Catholic worship is preserved. A confidence in "the honor of the human mind and heart" underlies the Council Fathers' decision to opt for "substantial unity" (CSL, 38) rather than formal unity, or uniformity, in its liturgical rites.

Indeed, from its earliest history, the Catholic Church has known diversity in its liturgical life, and did not regard this as a barrier to unity. The Tridentine era, however (the 400 years immediately preceding the Second Vatican Council), was marked by strong attempts to enforce uniformity around the globe. Therefore, the move toward inculturation of the liturgy represents a significant shift in perspective. What is the spirituality that is implied by this shift?

It is, first of all, a spirituality of respect for the human person. Culture is deeply interwoven in the fabric of the human person, and respect for culture is part of our calling to respect human persons. Second, it is a spirituality of peace in which the Gospel and the Catholic faith are understood not as something imposed by conquest, but good news that resonates with the best and deepest yearnings of the human soul. Finally, it is a spirituality of mission that sees in the global Church a great harvest of faith, ready to be gathered and shared in the prayer of the Church, for the glory of God.

For Discussion

- ▶ What spiritual challenges and opportunities do you see in belonging to a global Church?
- ▶ How do you discover solidarity with people of different cultures?

CONCLUSION

The umbrella for all the aspects of spirituality discussed above is a passion for the liturgy itself—love for it and confidence in it. The Council Fathers believed that the liturgy stands at the heart of the world. The *Constitution* reminds us that the liturgy is quite simply the most important thing we do, "a sacred action surpassing all others" (CSL, 7). It is "the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fount from which all the Church's power flows" (CSL, 10).

Such confidence in the rites of the Church arises not from pride in how they are composed or performed, or vanity about the music and art they have inspired over the centuries, nor because of organizational concerns or the presumed psychological benefits of worship. No, this confidence comes from the belief that Christ is present in the liturgy. It is Christ who makes liturgy the "summit and fount."

On the fortieth anniversary of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, Pope John Paul II expressed a wish that remains relevant today: "At the beginning of this millennium, may a 'liturgical spirituality' be developed that makes people conscious that Christ is the first 'liturgist' who never ceases to act in the Church and in the world through the Paschal Mystery continuously celebrated, and who associates the Church with himself, in praise of the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit" (*Spiritus et Sponsa*, 16).

For Discussion

- ▶ How do you understand spirituality as a passion for the liturgy? How does reading the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* change your understanding of the role of liturgy?
- ▶ In addition to the four aspects of spirituality discussed here, what other spiritual interests, commitments, and concerns do you find in the *Constitution*?

PRIOR TO THE NEXT SESSION:

- ▶ Review Chapter III of the *Constitution* "The Reform of the Sacred Liturgy," especially paragraph 34 on "noble simplicity."
- ▶ Reflect on the following questions:
 - Recall your own memories of liturgy prior to the Second Vatican Council, or interview a friend or family member who was living at the time to find out his or her recollections. In what ways did the liturgy change? How did you or your friend or family member react to those changes?
 - Does reading this chapter lead you to understand anything new about the liturgy as you experience it today?

The 50th Anniversary of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy: A Parish Celebration © 2013 Archdiocese of Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications. Orders: 1-800-933-1800. Written by Rita Ferrone. This material originally appeared in *Pastoral Liturgy*® magazine. Text from the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* © 1982, International Commission on English in the Liturgy Corporation (ICEL). Imprimatur granted by the Reverend Monsignor John F. Canary, Vicar General, Archdiocese of Chicago on June 5, 2013.