

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LITURGY

The development of the liturgy throughout history provides us with helpful insights into the nature and purpose of public worship in the life of the Christian believer today. It is important to look at this history in the light of tradition --the legitimate lived-experience of the Church through the generations. Some of these key moments are presented in the following outline:

### **A. Apostolic Church - First to Third Century**

The Scriptures and very early writings of the Christians in Rome and in Jerusalem provide us with the insights into their understanding of the Liturgy. The Eucharist was the Sunday gathering to remember the teachings of the Apostles and the lessons of the life of Christ, primarily in the mandate of the Last Supper--"do this in remembrance of me." To share the bread and wine was for them the sign of their unity in Christ, and their self-understanding as the Body of Christ. This demanded commitment, even in the face of persecution which dominated this period in the Church. To follow Christ meant paying the price! The "shape" of the Liturgy was the domestic gathering, improvised prayers of thanksgiving and petition, sharing the blessed bread and wine and responding to the needs of the poor. The early Church focused its attention on evangelization and on building the Kingdom of God.

### **B. Fourth Century to the Seventh Century**

The Peace of Constantine in 313 AD initiated a major change in Christianity. From being illegal, then tolerated in the first three centuries, with the conversion of the emperor, Constantine, Christianity was declared the state religion. Sunday was declared a day of rest and the liturgy took on new forms. Now that the people could worship publicly, the practices of the civil court are incorporated into the worship practices of the people. This becomes a period of creativity with the Church developing far beyond its Jewish roots.

### **C. The Eighth to the Thirteenth Centuries**

Charlemagne is the key figure in this period. His attempt to unify the Roman Empire includes the request for a unified book of prayers for the Liturgy. Local areas have had several centuries to include their own customs and traditions in the worship experience. By this time there are more than seven "Latin rites" being used throughout Europe. (The Eastern Churches have continued to maintain the use of the vernacular in their liturgy). The rise of the importance of the Roman liturgy is central to what happens in this period.

### **D. The Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Centuries**

Few liturgical changes take place during this period. There is little or no creativity, thus some stability begins to prevail, however, the people have begun to lose the essential meaning of the liturgy as a personal commitment to the way of the Gospel. Private prayers and devotions begin to mark the spirituality of the people. The Eucharist becomes an object of worship rather than an act of commitment. Benediction, the feast of *Corpus Christi*, devotions to Mary and the saints take a prominent role during these centuries.

### **E. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) - Twentieth Century.**

With the Protestant Reformation beginning around 1520, the Church of Rome is placed in a more defensive position. Centralization seems to be the answer to this major upset in Christianity. Unable to meet the demands of the reformers for the whole Church, different sects emerge. The sign of the unity of the Church is now seen in the unified liturgy that is expressed through fidelity to the rubrics and prayers. The Missal of Pope Pius V is published and mandated for use throughout the dioceses of Western Europe. Some of the abuses in the liturgy are removed, but the Mass is not yet restored as a true action of the community.

### **F. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)**

The promulgation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy includes a major reform of the Mass and the sacraments. "Back to the basics" might best describe the bishops' decisions for the reforms of the Roman liturgy. The Eucharist as meal is put forth in our renewed understanding of the Mass. The liturgy as the public prayer of the people and a commitment to live the Gospel predominate. Diversity and adaptation are not excluded. The restoration of the Catechumenate (RCIA) as the way of initiating adult members into the Church enlightens our understanding of Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist and Reconciliation. The communal celebration of all of the sacraments is re-introduced. The Second Vatican Council provided the Church with a fresh look at Scripture, ecumenism, the liturgy and meaning of the Church in the modern world. By introducing many practical changes in the liturgy, this Council returned the liturgy to the language and comprehension of the people who celebrate it.

*O Sacred Banquet  
in which Christ is received  
the memory of his passion is recalled,  
the soul is filled with grace  
and the pledge of future glory is given to us.-from St. Thomas Aquinas, O.P. (1245 A.D.)*

*The Mystery of Faith...*

WE PROCLAIM YOUR DEATH, O LORD  
AND PROFESS YOUR RESURRECTION  
UNTIL YOU COME AGAIN.

Jesus Christ YESTERDAY  
TODAY and  
TOMORROW.

LITURGY is  
...the work of the people  
...the public worship of the Church (the People of God)  
...the experience of the mystery of God  
...the baptized faithful  
gathered around WORD and SACRAMENT  
...words, signs, symbols, gestures, silence, song  
...the call to justice  
..."ever-ancient, ever new" (St. Augustine)

LITURGY has  
...a flow and rhythm  
...a balance between verbal and non-verbal,  
...cultural and traditional elements

LITURGY requires  
...time given graciously by all--the presider, the liturgical ministers, and the assembly--so  
that the liturgy may unfold and bring all to new life!

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INTRODUCTORY RITES - [prepare us to hear the Word of God!]

Procession

Song

Greeting

Penitential Rite or Sprinkling Rite (with music)

Lord have Mercy

Glory to God

Opening Prayer

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LITURGY OF THE WORD

FIRST READING (Old Testament)

Responsorial Psalm with antiphon

SECOND READING (Writings of the Apostles)

Gospel Acclamation

GOSPEL (M/M/L/J)

HOMILY

PROFESSION OF FAITH

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

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LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Prepare the table/Present the Gifts

Collect the Money [for the poor?]

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

Holy, Holy, + Memorial Acclamation +Amen

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COMMUNION RITE

Our Father

Greeting of Peace

Lamb of God

Communion Procession song

Prayer after Communion

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CONCLUDING RITE

Blessing

Dismissal [GO IN PEACE TO LOVE AND SERVE THE LORD!]

Recessional Song