II. THE PROMOTION OF LITURGICAL INSTRUCTION AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

14. The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pt 2:9; see 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.

In the reform and promotion of the liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else. For it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit and therefore pastors must zealously strive in all their pastoral work to achieve such participation by means of the necessary instruction.

Yet it would be futile to entertain any hopes of realizing this unless, in the first place, the pastors themselves become thoroughly imbued with the spirit and power of the liturgy and make themselves its teachers. A prime need, therefore, is that attention be directed, first of all, to the liturgical formation of the clergy. Wherefore the Council has decided to enact what follows.
1. Prepare by reviewing pages 1 and 2 of this booklet in silence
2. Begin with sung prayer: “Holy Wisdom, Lamp of Learning” Duck or another song
3. View the corresponding short video – discuss insights – gather questions for more study
4. End with the “Prayer Used before Every Session of the Second Vatican Council”

Insights from the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* [CSL]

1. Denis McNamara begins: “Active participation works on two levels….The people should be doing the things that belong to them in the rites.”

   Is my parish more active or passive during Sunday Mass? What about me? Why is this so?

2. The narrator explains:
   **EXTERNAL PARTICIPATION – THE FIRST STAGE INCLUDES**
   - Responding
   - Singing
   - Gesturing
   **INTERNAL PARTICIPATION WITHIN EACH INDIVIDUAL PERSON – THE SECOND STAGE INCLUDES**
   - Experiencing
   - Understanding
   - Being Transformed

   “When we engage in an interior participation, we open ourselves to the effect of God’s grace within the liturgical action. We begin to bring the Liturgy into our lives and, at the same time, bring the concerns and joys of our lives to the altar.”

   How has my external participation over time enhanced, enriched, and enabled my interior participation in all Liturgy?

3. Sister Kathleen Hughes challenges us “to become very attentive”.

   What can I bring, what do I bring to the celebration of the Eucharist that “needs to be transformed, just as really as the bread and wine, into the Body and Blood of Christ?”

4. Father Raymond East says: “Liturgy gives us permission to express that [‘something on the inside’, ‘something within’] to come out…and then the communal [aspects] help us understand the interaction between the individual response and…the action of the Holy Spirit together in the community.”

   How has full, conscious, and active participation improved my understanding of Liturgy and driven both me and my parish to put head and hands and hearts to Kingdom work?

---

**AN ASIDE:** Mark Searle, in *Called to Participate: Theological, Ritual and Social Perspectives*, lists progressively deeper and more demanding levels of active participation: 1"sup”, participation in the ritual; 2"sup”, participation in Jesus’s death and rising; and 3"sup”, participation in the mystery of the Triune God.

---

Booklet prepared by the Office for Worship and the Catechumenate, Diocese of Springfield in Illinois for use by parishes and agencies that have purchased the Liturgy Training Publication resource: *The 50th Anniversary of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy: A Parish Celebration.*
“Before people can come to the liturgy they must be called to faith and conversion”

(Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 9)

Liturgy is the work of Christ in the midst of his people. For any type of work to be fruitful, something needs to happen beforehand. Before a paper is written or a movie is produced, painstaking research occurs. For the work of Christ to transform the faithful during the liturgy, faith and conversion need to happen beforehand. This call to faith and conversion is a continual part of the life of disciples. As we prepare for the liturgy each week, we prepare for Christ’s work in our lives, a work that can transform us and deepen our life with him through our openness. Conversion is the transformation of our hearts, our whole being, to the love of Christ. This journey, or pilgrimage, takes our entire life. In preparing for liturgy, we might consider where we are in our faith journey.

“Such participation by the Christian people as ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people’ (1 Peter 2:9; see 2:4–5) is their right and duty by reason of their baptism”

(Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 14)

That the Church is “a chosen race” suggests that God chose, or called, each of us to be members of his Church. Priests are those who offer prayers and worship on behalf of others. Each baptized person prays for the needs of the world, the Church, the nation, and those in need. Daily prayer is a priestly act by the baptized. During Lent, the giving of alms, praying for others, and fasting are aspects of the priesthood of the baptized. The Church is also called to be “a holy nation.” When we think of the word nation, we tend to think of our country and its government or political concerns. As a holy nation, the Church promotes holiness in families, neighborhoods, society, and the world. This means living the fruits of faith in what one does daily.
“The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy”

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 14

This sentence may well be one of the most-quoted phrases from the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Participation in the liturgy, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy suggests, has three aspects. First it is full. The faithful are to be engaged in their participation in the parts proper to them throughout the liturgy. Secondly, participation should be conscious. The faithful should not only have a sense of knowing what they are doing but seek to take to heart, to embody, what is said in the prayers, sung in the music, and done in the sacraments. In other words, through our participation, we consider how we are called to be disciples of Christ. Finally, we actively participate in each part of the liturgy in the hopes of growing in the discipleship Christ calls each person to within the liturgy.

THE ASSEMBLY’S MINISTRY
by Eliot Kapitan

Family gatherings teach its members how to interact. Recall how your immediate and extended family comes together for holidays, reunions, and anniversaries. The reason for gathering is usually quite clear.

They travel from homes to the designated place. They know what is expected. They know each others tasks and duties. They know who does what and who says what.

HOW THE CHURCH PRAYS

Members of the Church behave in much the same way. On Sunday, they come from many homes to the Church’s house. They interact by:

- greeting others who also come;
- signing with baptismal/holy water;
- recollecting, praying, and preparing;
- standing as one and singing with one voice;
- sitting as one to listen to the word of God;
- standing to profess faith and make faithful prayer;
- collecting gifts to prepare table and selves;
- engaging the great prayer of thanks and praise;
- processing to the altar table to eat and drink; and
- being dismissed.

WHAT THE CHURCH BELIEVES BY PRAYING

We come to the Sunday celebration not as an audience to watch and critique. We come instead as participants to take up one more time our distinctive role, tasks, and ministry. We come out of duty and out of love. We come to do what we do best, participating by:

- greeting with hospitality and care all those bound together in love by God in Christ;
- signing the body with the symbol of salvation (cross) and the sacramental matter (water) that is both entry into the Church’s life and the authorization for ministry;
- preparing personally for the Church’s central work soon to begin;
- acting as one Body of Christ – singing, recalling, praising, and praying;
- hearing the appointed portion of God’s holy word and resting in Christ’s holy presence;
- professing the shared faith, praying for known needs, and dismissing beloved catechumens for continued prayer;
- gathering gifts for the poor and the Church and then preparing both table and selves for the holy meal;
- giving thanks and praise through acclamation and attention to the Eucharistic Prayer;
- praying given words (Lord’s Prayer), sharing peace we have only in Christ, and eating and drinking the Body and Blood of Christ in holy procession; and
- going to do good works, to be good disciples, and to help bring on the reign and Kingdom of God.

Art, Steve Erspamer, © 1992, Archdiocese of Chicago. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.
WHAT THE CHURCH LEARNS BY BELIEVING

The reform and promotion of the Liturgy undertaken by Vatican Council II uncovered something always believed by the Church but not always practiced. The Council affirmed this fundamental goal to be considered before all else: “that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people’ (1 Peter 2:9; see 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism” [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 14].

Sunday celebration after Sunday celebration reminds us that Liturgy is the first school of the Church. The Church learns from its chief work – Liturgy – by doing it again and again.

In Baptism, we don the garment of Christ’s priestly, prophetic, and royal life. Because of this sacramental act, we cannot be passive observers in either Liturgy or life.

Because of Baptism and participation in Sunday, we are part of the whole Christ. He is the head, we are the vital members. All share in baptismal priesthood. Some among the baptized are chosen for the ordained priesthood of Bishop, Presbyter, and Deacon.

Because of this ministry founded in the one Christ we find these ministries:

(a) the assembly who are there not “as strangers or silent spectators” but rather ministers “conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full involvement” because of a “good understanding of the rites and prayers” [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 48];

(b) special and extraordinary ministers to assist as needed with welcoming, singing, reading, gathering, and Communion; and

(c) ordinary ministers to preside, preach, and oversee the Sacraments.

And we take these words to heart: “The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ’s faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred service conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full involvement. They should be instructed by God’s word and be nourished at the table of the Lord’s body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn also to offer themselves as well; through Christ the Mediator, they should be formed day by day into an ever more perfect unity with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all” [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 48].

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Good songs with good texts help us proclaim what we hold in faith. Look to “God Is Here! As We His People” (Fred Pratt Green) ABBOT’S LEIGH, 8 7 8 7 D; “As We Gather at Your Table” (Carl P. Daw, Jr.) NETTLETON 8 7 8 7 D; and “Lord, You Give the Great Commission” (Jeffery Rowthorn) ABBOT’S LEIGH, 8 7 8 7 D.

Eliot Kapitan is the director for the Office for Worship and the Catechumenate in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois.
“The faith of those taking part is nourished”

(Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 33)

We are created by and yearn to grow ever deeper in communion with God. One of the joys of the gift and challenge of free will is that we must grow in that communion. It doesn’t always come naturally. We believe that, above all else, the liturgy is “the worship of the divine majesty” (33). Yet it is a gift of God that, in praising God, we grow. We find nourishment in giving ourselves in praise back to our Creator. Is this not also true, if to a more limited extent, in other relationships? When we love and honor those in our lives who are in need, do we not grow in love? In worship, we honor God with external and internal prayers, songs, or actions, and in doing so, we create space for God to nourish the recesses of our hearts.

“The use of the mother tongue . . . may be of great advantage to the people”

(Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 36)

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 remarkable that these communities held together their past and present with several languages. Since the Second Vatican Council’s allowance of greater use of the vernacular, every culture that celebrates the liturgy has demonstrated that use of the “mother tongue” facilitates prayer. Latin plays an important role in our prayer, and yet the Council Fathers wisely encourage the People of God to also use their native languages as we deepen our communion with God.
“Christ’s faithful . . . should not be there as . . . silent spectators”

(Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 48)

The Council Fathers are daring in this paragraph: We shouldn’t be “strangers or silent spectators.” They go on to say that we participate in the priest’s activity by offering Christ with him, while at the same time offering ourselves. This is a high level of activity to which we are called; it is the activity of the salvation of the world. These words remind us that our worship is fuller when we know one another. Our worship is fuller when we join in the salvific activity of the Church, as is our “right and duty” (see paragraph 14). The audacity of the Eucharist is reflected in the last line of this paragraph, in which we are reminded that the goal of Eucharistic thanksgiving is an “ever more perfect unity with God and with each other.” When we worship together as the Body of Christ, “finally God may be all in all.”
Our Call to Participation

A colleague spoke recently of showing up for class to discuss one of his favorite authors. His class was to start with students discussing the book in small groups. As my friend made his way from one group to another, he noticed that the material had not been read. He then invited the students to return to their original places to discuss their critical analysis of the literary work. He asked his first question. Dead silence. He waited. No response. He rephrased the question. Once again, no one spoke. The awkward silence was now too much. He waited until someone answered. Finally, one student hesitantly ventured an answer. No one challenged the student's vague answer. So, the professor asked how many students read the required material. Only two hands went up. The lack of participation in the course led to a lack of learning.

This story is very apropos to our participation within the liturgical event. Pope Benedict XVI noted occasionally that the liturgy is a "school." In other words, liturgy trains us to grow in discipleship. We can understand the liturgy as a "school" in two ways. First, liturgy catechizes or educates us. Various parts of the liturgy relay information to us. Our intellects grow as we take in the meaning of the Homily, the proclamation of the readings, the hearing of the prayers, and so forth. In this sense, our minds are nourished.

Second, the liturgy concerns our bodies. Liturgy not only uses words, but also "the works of our hands" or elements from nature, that is, material objects. Liturgy makes use of water, fire, oil, bread, and wine. These material objects touch bodies (though in the case of fire, it touches us through its heat and light). From a theological perspective, God's work of sanctifying these elements imparts more than intellectual knowledge; they mediate, or we might say, make tangible, God's loving touch to and within us.

The healing anointing by the priest with the oil of the sick touches us physically. Likewise, in the use of holy water, whether during Baptisms or when we bless ourselves upon entering the worship space, our body is touched by God's purifying, cleansing, and life-giving Spirit. Therefore, the liturgy "school" us to shape our minds, bodies, souls, and hearts into a deeper living out of God's desires for us. But to achieve the holiness that God offers us, and indeed calls us to, we must be open to the power of God's transforming "touch."

How does liturgy as a "school" help us to understand our call to participation? In the story of the professor, the students' education suffered because they were neither prepared nor engaged with the topic. In liturgy, we are called to participate. Participation requires our investment in the liturgy. It requires our openness to God's acting through words, gestures, music, prayers, and material objects.

Participation is not, however, utilitarian, that is, it is not only about "showing up or doing things; rather, participation leads to transformation. Though participation requires showing up and doing things, another level allows what happens (the actions of liturgy or the actions of the Triune God) to shape us. Our participation in liturgy may allow us to grow in our knowledge of and union with God, who seeks and desires our growth in holiness.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy says we are called to "full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations" (14). As students of the liturgy, our schooling is shaped by our level of participation. The effect of that participation is the active living out—through our minds and bodies—of God's healing and loving touch in, to, and through us.
Prayer Used before Every Session
of the Second Vatican Council

*Book of Blessings*, no. 552 A.

We stand before you, Holy Spirit,
conscious of our sinfulness,
but aware that we gather in your name.

Come to us, remain with us,
and enlighten our hearts.

Give us light and strength
to know your will,
to make it our own,
and to live it in our lives.

Guide us by your wisdom,
support us by your power,
for you are God,
sharing the glory of Father and Son.

You desire justice for all:
enable us to uphold the rights of others;
do not allow us to be misled by ignorance
or corrupted by fear or favor.

Unite us to yourself in the bond of love
and keep us faithful to all that is true.

As we gather in your name,
may we temper justice with love,
so that all our decisions
may be pleasing to you,
and earn the reward
promised to good and faithful servants.

You live and reign with the Father and the Son,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.