

SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY

Celebrating the Church's Liturgy

A Life of Signs and Symbols: Fr. Mychael Judge's life was in many ways marked by signs and symbols. As a Franciscan priest, Fr. Mychael wore the usual brown friar's habit and sandals of St. Francis when he helped serve food to the homeless or chat with the maids who cleaned at the hotels near his parish in lower Manhattan. But when the fire alarm for FDNY Engine 1/Ladder 24 sounded, Fr. Mychael changed into his fireman's uniform and helmet and headed out to the scene with his unit.

The situation was no different on Tuesday, September 11, 2001. In the same way he had for nearly thirty years as a fire department chaplain, Fr. Mychael raced out to be with the others in his company after the first plane struck the World Trade Center. Fire engulfed the top floors of Tower 2 of the World Trade Center building. Trapped people were leaping from windows nearly one hundred stories up to escape the flames that would kill them. A falling woman struck one of the firefighters from Engine 1 /Ladder 24.

Fr. Mychael knelt down by the dying man. He removed his helmet, began to locate his pyx (containing the Blessed Sacrament) and the sacred oils, and prepared to administer the Anointing of the Sick or last rites to the firefighter. Only seconds later a piece of debris crashed into Fr. Mychael, killing him as well. Five firemen broke from their duties, picked up Fr. Mychael's body, carried him to a nearby church, and laid him before the altar. They covered him with a white cloth and his stole, and put his helmet and fireman's badge on his chest.

Later in the day, they came back and took Fr. Mychael's body to their fire-house. There, they laid him in the bed of the fire truck. Engine 1 /Ladder 24 lost ten other firefighters that day. Those who survived came to mourn and pay their respects near where Fr. Mychael was laid. So did his Franciscan brothers. At his funeral, the coffin was covered with a simple white alb with Fr. Mychael's helmet marked "Chaplain" placed upon it. His Franciscan habit and fireman's helmet, the pyx and the sacred oils, his stole and the altar before which his comrades laid him - all of these are signs and symbols of Fr. Mychael's life and dedication, his very identity as a priest and fire department chaplain.

He went to Ground Zero with the expectation that he would administer the sacrament of the last rites to the victims. Fr. Michael Duffy explained in his homily at Fr. Mychael's funeral that "Two to three hundred firemen are still buried there. It would have been physically impossible to administer the sacraments to all of them

in this life. In the next life, Fr. Mychael will greet them with 'Welcome. Let me take you to our Father.'" Fr. Mychael Judge's death certificate administered by the City of New York has the number 1 on it. His body was the first released from Ground Zero. "His role was to bring firemen to their death and meet their maker," Fr. Duffy added. The following prayer was written by Fr. Mychael Judge: Lord, take me where You want me to go; Let me meet who You want me to meet; Tell me what You want me to say, and Keep me out of Your way.

Our lives too are filled with signs and symbols. Signs can be anything that point to something else; words, objects, and actions can all be signs. A school bell tells you when the period is over. A red light means "stop." There are natural signs too that are not created by people: smoke is the sign that fire may be near; a wagging tail on a dog and a smile on a person help us to conclude that each is happy.

Symbols are special signs that go beyond just "pointing" to something. Symbols are part of what they point to, but not all of it. Fire, for example, is a symbol of warmth. Fire is a source of warmth and is necessary for it, but there is more to warmth than fire. Symbols evoke deeper meanings than signs do, they elicit both conscious and unconscious feelings within us. For example, the nation's flag may evoke feelings of pride and patriotism. An old photo may stir up special thoughts and feelings for the person and time depicted. The flag and the photo also convey another dimension of a symbol: something that both reveals and conceals the fullness of the reality it communicates. The flag may inspire pride in a country's virtues, but may also conceal the nation's failings; the photograph may capture a dimension of a person, but can only reveal certain aspects of one's essence. Some symbols, like fire or water, are so rooted in our human existence that we grasp their meaning without any need for instruction. Others, like a ring or a stole, become symbols as we grow in our understanding of their meaning.

People can be signs and symbols too. Fr. Mychael Judge was certainly a sign of courage, goodness, and his faith for people who heard about his life and how it ended on September 11. The religious habit and firefighter's uniform he wore were visible signs of who he was. t

Symbols are more powerful than signs. They have a depth of meaning that signs do not and they can capture our attention and emotions in a way signs can't. Yet despite their ability to communicate a greater reality, they are not identical to it. This, as we have begun to discover already, is how they differ from sacraments. Sacraments are celebrations that are "woven from signs and symbols" (CCC, 1145). Signs and symbols play a central role in their celebration. Having explored

how the fruits of Christ's Paschal mystery are dispensed in the sacraments we will look at the following questions:

- Who celebrates the liturgy?
- How is the liturgy celebrated?
- When is the liturgy celebrated?
- Where is the liturgy celebrated?

Who Celebrates the Liturgy? The Catechism defines liturgy as: "The participation of the People of God in 'the work of God.' Through the liturgy Christ, our redeemer and high priest, continues the work of our redemption in, with, and through his Church." (1069). The liturgy is first of all celebrated by Christ. He is the celebrant of the Eucharist and all the sacraments. In them, he is active in the Church, both in the People of God as a whole, and in the distinctive ways that the ordained and laity participate in the liturgy.

Just as Christ acts "in, with, and through his Church," so the Church acts in, with, and through Christ. The Church also celebrates the liturgy. "It is the whole community, the Body of Christ united with its Head, that celebrates" (CCC, 1140). The Church on earth is united with the Church in heaven in its praise of the God. Those already in heaven - angels, ancestors from the Old Testament, martyrs, Mary, the Mother of God, and the entire communion of saints - celebrate the heavenly liturgy completely in communion with the Blessed Trinity and with one another.

We, the Pilgrim Church, participate in this eternal liturgy whenever we participate in the sacramental liturgy on earth. And, our participation is absolutely needed because liturgy is an action of *Christus totus*, the "whole Christ." When we are absent from liturgy one piece of the body of Christ is missing.

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, liturgy was often celebrated in private or quasi-private. In many Catholic churches designed prior to Vatican II, you can witness evidence of this today as the nave often included one main sanctuary and altar and two side altars where Mass may have been offered privately. Also, in those times, the assembly's participation was understood in less active terms. Hence, some people prayed the rosary or other devotions while remaining on the outskirts of the liturgy.

Nowadays, the Church reminds us that it is the whole community, united with Christ, that celebrates liturgy. According to the fathers of the Second Vatican Council: Liturgical services are not private functions but are celebrations of the

Church which is the "sacrament of unity," namely, the holy people united and organized under the authority of the bishops (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 26).

Celebrated in community, liturgy involves all members of the Body of Christ, each according to their calling. The distinct roles within the liturgy flow from the distinct ways that the "common priesthood" of all the baptized and the "ministerial priesthood" of the ordained participate in the one priesthood of Christ.

Two Ways to Participate in the One Priesthood of Christ: St. Thomas Aquinas correctly taught that "Only Christ is the true priest, the others being only his ministers." The letter to the Hebrews describes Christ as a high priest who is "holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, higher than the heavens" (7:26). Christ is different from the priests of the Old Testament who offered sacrifice day after day. Christ offered one sacrifice - the sacrifice of the cross - that is made present in the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Church. In the same way, Christ's one priesthood is made present through the ministerial priesthood without diminishing Christ's unique priesthood.

In fact, the entire Church is priestly. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, we each share in Christ's mission as priest, prophet, and king. This is what is known as the common priesthood. As Catholics, we share this priestly ministry of Christ whenever we use our talents to continue his work to bring God's love to others. Some of the ways we do this include:

- **Witness.** We must share the Good News with our words and actions. By being honest and sincere with our love for others and by not shrinking when asked about Christ and our values, we witness him to the world.
- **Live in Community.** We live in community with people through the whole world. When we build up this community through the reconciling of differences, acting for peace, and working for justice, we bring Christ to the world.
- **Serve.** Jesus modeled service when he washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper. We, too, in humility must serve the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of all, especially our least brothers and sisters.
- **Worship.** It is through the sacraments - especially the Eucharist - that a vital function of the common priesthood takes place. When we gather together and pray, we permit the Holy Spirit to pray in and through us. We adore and thank God, ask for forgiveness, and petition for our needs. Joined to Christ, the High Priest, our prayers become his prayer.

The ministerial or hierarchical priesthood is different than the common priesthood, yet nevertheless related. The ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common

priesthood. The ministerial priesthood is the means by which Christ builds up and leads his Church. That is why it is transmitted by its own sacrament, the sacrament of Holy Orders (CCC, 1547). By the sacred power he has been given in the sacrament, the ministerial priest molds and rules the priestly people.

The priest also acts in the name of the whole Church when presenting to God the Father the prayer of the Church, and above all when offering the Eucharistic sacrifice to the Father in the name of the people. The priest represents Christ when presiding at Eucharist.

The assembly joins in the offering of the Eucharist and the other sacraments by virtue of their priesthood given in Baptism and Confirmation: The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of Vatican II taught that the "full, conscious, and active participation" of the faithful in the liturgy is a right and duty that comes from our Baptism. We participate in liturgy through acclamations, responses, singing, actions, gestures, and other body positions. Silence, too, is a proper response at certain times in the liturgy. At liturgy generally and the Eucharist specifically, other people with particular ministries not consecrated in the sacrament of Holy Orders serve in roles such as servers, readers, commentators, extraordinary ministers of holy communion, and members of the choir.

How is the Liturgy Celebrated? Sacraments are celebrated with signs and symbols, words and actions, singing and music, and holy images called icons. , The signs and symbols used in liturgy come from God's creation. For example, light and darkness, wind and fire, water and earth, the tree and its fruit, tell of God and symbolize his greatness and nearness. Signs and symbols used in liturgy also come from our human life. These include washing and anointing, breaking bread and sharing the cup - things that are part of our everyday lives.

There are also signs and symbols taken from the Old Testament. Some of these were once cosmic signs that may have been incorporated from other social traditions of the time. Yet, in making his covenant with them, Yahweh transformed actions and events like circumcision, the anointing and consecration of kings and priests, laying on of hands, sacrifices, and the harvest festivals into actions and events with religious meaning. These signs also are understood to prefigure the sacraments of the New Covenant.

Jesus, too, used signs to help make known the mysteries of God's kingdom. He performed healings and used symbolic gestures to accompany his preaching. His life itself gives meaning to the signs of the Old Testament - especially the Exodus

and Passover - because in him the hidden meaning of those signs is revealed. Since Pentecost, the Church has incorporated even more signs, symbols, gestures, actions, and words into its- liturgy. These include Scripture reading, processions, holy water, kneeling, blessings, anointing with oil, candles, incense, standing and sitting, musical instruments, singing, and more.

Many of the signs and symbols of liturgy have been taken from everyday life. Things like washing, anointing with oil, and the sharing of food and drink are incorporated into our religious life where they help us express our relationship with God. The fact that water is used in Baptism helps us to see and feel the cleansing that is happening. The food of the Eucharist helps us to see, feel, and taste the nourishment and strength that Christ is giving us. The fact that our worship was formed in the created world and uses everyday actions makes it accessible to all people and not just the well-educated. If a person can understand that food gives us energy, or that water makes us clean, or that certain ointments protect us and heal us, he or she can understand the gifts of the sacraments.

Tracing the Meaning of the Term "Sacrament" The New Testament term for sacraments is the Greek word *mysterion* which translates to "mystery." St. Paul used the word *mysterion* to refer to Christ, apostolic preaching, those things that are spoken in the Spirit, and the relationship between Christ and the Church and a husband and wife. The word sacrament itself comes from the Latin word, *sacramentum*, which is translated from *mysterion*. For Romans, sacrament originally referred to a bond, seal, or sign that took the form of a pledge of property or money. Roman soldiers applied the term to the oath they took to their commanders and gods.

Church Father Tertullian applied the term *sacramentum* to the Christian rites of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. He did so in an attempt to inform Roman citizens about the formal pledge Christians made to be loyal to Jesus and to serve God faithfully.

St. Augustine, in the fifth century, developed the meaning of sacrament as a special sign or symbol. Augustine's definition of sacraments as a "visible sign of invisible grace" refers to sacraments being holy signs through which we can both perceive and receive invisible grace. Grace, in this understanding, refers to what was later defined as sanctifying grace. At the time, Augustine used the term "sacrament" to describe many things including the giving of salt at Baptism, the giving of ashes, the creed, and the Lord's Prayer.

St. Thomas Aquinas referred to sacraments as efficacious symbols. Recall that ordinary symbols communicate a greater reality while remaining distinct from it. A sacrament, as an efficacious symbol "effects what it symbolizes and symbolizes what it effects." As the Catechism explains: "As a fire transforms into itself everything it touches, so the Holy Spirit transforms into the divine life whatever is subjected to his power" (1127). In a sacrament, there is a pointing to and effecting of the reality symbolized. A sacrament not only signifies a sacred reality but actually puts us in touch with it.

Words, Actions, Songs, Images: The words spoken and the actions performed by the assembly (the people) at liturgy are the means by which the assembly ministers to one another in liturgy. The fact that the people say and do the same thing at the same time is a sign of unity which liturgy establishes and strengthens.

In particular, liturgy includes the use of the Word of God which has been given to us in the scriptures. "The liturgy of the Word is an integral part of sacramental celebrations" (CCC, 1154). The Second Vatican Council also taught the importance of the Scriptures in liturgy for, it is from Scripture that lessons are read and explained in the homily, and psalms are sung the prayers, collects, and liturgical songs are scriptural in their inspiration, and it is from Scripture that actions and signs derive their meaning (*Sacrosanctum Concillium*, 24).

Prior to the Council only a select few of Old Testament and New Testament passages were read at Mass. Now the Church has a three-year cycle of Sunday readings and a two-year cycle of weekday readings so that Catholics at Mass are * able to hear a good selection of the Old Testament and samples from virtually all of the books of the New Testament over that period. All of the readings are now done in the vernacular, the common language of the people.

At liturgy, several visible signs which accompany the Word of God are emphasized. For example:

- The Word of God is contained in a special book - a lectionary or a book of the gospels.
- The Word of God is venerated with a procession, incense, and candles.
- The Word of God is proclaimed in an audible and intelligible way.
- The Word of God is extended through the homily, which derives its teaching from the Scriptures.
- The Word of God is responded to by the assembly through acclamations, psalms, litanies, and professions of faith.

The other words which are used in the liturgy are also words of God. The Church has chosen the words of our prayers, responses, and creeds because they express the faith the Holy Spirit stirs within us. Our faith is the faith of the Church. Through the Church God gives us the ability to speak and respond to him as a people who are truly united. Each of the prayers and the responses of the liturgy help shape our relationship with God. When we say them week in and week out, they work their way into our lives and very souls and shape us as a people of faith. For example, the Kyrie helps us to see ourselves as people who are dependent upon God. Over time it helps us to develop the desire and the ability to ask for and receive forgiveness.

The Church also celebrates liturgy with music. The Second Vatican Council called music "a necessary or integral part of solemn liturgy" (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 112). Music allows us to express what is in our hearts. It also moves us in ways that words alone cannot. When music accompanies liturgical actions or gives expression to liturgical words, those actions and words have greater impact on us. Music with liturgy expresses prayerfulness, builds community, and increases the solemnity of the liturgical rites.

The setting for liturgy is also important. Icons are holy images that help us to focus our attention on Jesus, the Son of God. Statues, paintings, stained glass, and other sacred art present images of Jesus as well as the images of Mary and the saints who have been transfigured into his likeness. When we contemplate on the sacred icons together with meditation on the Word of God and the singing of liturgical hymns, we enter more deeply into the signs of the liturgy so that their meaning becomes part of our lives and we are able to share it with others.

A Treasure of Immeasurable Value: St. Augustine said, "He who sings prays twice." The Second Vatican Council described the musical tradition of the Church as "a treasure of immeasurable value." Among some of the other teachings of the Council regarding music are:

- Liturgical action is given a more noble form when sacred rites are solemnized in song, with the assistance of sacred ministers and the active participation of the people.
- Choirs are to be promoted and trained, but whenever the liturgy is to be celebrated with song, the entire assembly should actively participate.
- The teaching and practice of music must be promoted in seminaries, in novitiates, schools, and other Catholic institutions. Composers and singers should be given liturgical training.
- Gregorian chant is proper to liturgy in the Roman Catholic Church. It should

be given a place of pride in liturgical services.

- Religious singing by the people is to be skillfully taught so that their voices may ring out.
- When possible, the native music of people of mission lands and other parts of the world should be adapted to worship.
- The pipe organ is a traditional musical instrument that should be held in high esteem.
- Composers, filled with the Christian spirit, should feel called to cultivate sacred music.
- The musical texts should be drawn chiefly from the scriptures and from liturgical sources; they should be in conformity with Catholic doctrine.

When Is the Liturgy Celebrated? Even though God is outside of human history, he enters our time and our space so that we might know him. This is one of the fundamental principles of the Judeo-Christian tradition. We do not need to escape time in order to relate to God. God communicates with us in time. For this reason our worship does not release us from the routine of our lives. Instead it plunges us more deeply into the rhythms of time and invites us to rework each aspect of our lives in light of what God has done and is doing for us.

The worship of the Church is structured around yearly, weekly, and daily schedules. Yearly events help us to understand God's constancy in the midst of change. They also help us to see the faithfulness of God and to find direction in our lives. Weekly events help us structure our work and our family life around our relationship with God. And daily events help us to shape our self-identity around that same relationship.

As our worship plunges us into the rhythms of time, it makes all time part of the present. "Today" is the word that marks the prayer of the Church. As we celebrate the Paschal mystery in all of its dimensions on a daily, weekly, and yearly basis, all of the events of salvation history become part of our own lives. They become events of today.

The celebration of Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection unfolding over the course of the year is called the liturgical year. It is the basic rhythm of our Christian life through which we experience the natural cycle of the year as "a year of the Lord's grace."

Jewish Roots: The liturgical year has its roots in Judaism. Jesus, as a faithful Jew, observed the various festivals of the Jewish year, most notably the Passover. It was during the Passover in Jerusalem that the Last Supper and his passion and death took place. The defining moment in Jewish history is the Exodus. The Book of Exodus records not only God's liberation of the Jews from slavery in Egypt, but gives explicit instructions for a yearly commemoration of these saving events. The Passover and the Exodus are annual events which allow all Jews to continue to experience God's saving work. By celebrating this festival each year in memory of God's action, the Jewish people continue to consciously participate in this saving work.

They grow in their awareness of all of the ways in which God is continually acting to bring them freedom, life, and salvation. The yearly celebration of Passover helps Jews of each generation to make God's gift of freedom their own.

Along with Passover there were two other major festivals which shaped the Jewish year at the time of Jesus: Pentecost (also called Shavuot) which celebrated the giving of the commandments and was also a time of thanksgiving for the wheat harvest; and Succoth (Feast of Booths) which was a time of thanksgiving for the grape harvest and which culminated with a celebration that recalls the giving of the Torah.

In Jesus' time all Jewish men ever age twelve were expected to travel to Jerusalem for at least one of these three festivals each year. Passover, Pentecost, and Succoth were the principal feasts of the Jewish year in Jesus' time. Today Passover remains at the center of the Jewish year, along with Rosh Hashanah, the new year feast, Yom Kippur, the feast of atonement, and Hanukkah, the feast of the dedication of the Temple. Besides these four, Shavuot and Succoth are still celebrated along with Purim, the Jewish carnival.

Historically, these feasts helped the Jewish people find their identity and their place within creation. One thing that we should note about the Jewish calendar is that all of the significant events of the natural world - things like planting harvests and the major seasonal changes - are linked to and understood in light of God's saving actions. As Christians began to develop their own annual calendar they continued this same pattern, interpreting and celebrating all significant events in light of God's saving action.

The Lord's Day: Sunday is the original feast day for Christians. The first day of the week according to the Jewish calendar, it is the day on which Christ rose from

the dead. From the Church's very beginning, Christians have gathered on this day to celebrate the Eucharist and to proclaim their faith in the resurrection. St. Jerome (ca. 380-420), one of the Fathers of the Church, wrote: The Lord's day, the day of the Resurrection, the day of Christians, is our day. It is called the Lord's day because on it the Lord rose victorious to the Father. If pagans call it the 'day of the sun ' we willingly agree, for today the light of the world is raised, today is revealed the sun of justice with healing in his wings (CCC, 1166).

Sunday is the first day of the week, the day on which God began the work of creation. It is also called the "eighth day" because on it we look forward to Christ's return in glory when the work of creation and salvation is finished. "On the evening of the first day of the week" Jesus appeared to his disciples and said to them, "Peace be with you" (Jn 20:19). Throughout the New Testament we find the Church gathered for Eucharist on "the first day." In the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr tells us that the Church in Rome would gather on Sunday. The "apostles or prophets were read," the priest gave instruction, prayers were offered, and the bread and wine were blessed with thanksgiving and distributed [First Apology, 67).

The New Testament also refers to a special meal shared by Christians known as an agape, or a "love meal." This was a meal of sharing, usually held in a "house church," a Christian's home. The Eucharist was shared in many places in conjunction with an agape. Read about two examples of agape in Acts 2:46 and 20:7 and some abuses of this practice in 1 Cor 11:1-7 which caused the Eucharist to be separated from it.

The earliest Jewish Christians continued to celebrate the Sabbath along with the commemoration of the Resurrection on the first day of the week.

The word Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word, * Shabbat, which literally translates "cease or desist." It is the seventh day when God rested after completing the work of creation. "So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from the work he had done in creation" (Gn 2:3).

For the first three centuries of Christianity there was no mention of abstaining from work on Sundays. Jews and Jewish Christians continued to keep Saturday as a day of rest however. In 321 the Emperor Constantine declared Sunday to be a day of rest for all judges, city dwellers, and business people. Farmers were allowed to work so as not to miss the good weather.

Even as Sunday began to take on the connotations of the Jewish Sabbath and become a day of rest, the primary focus for the day remained on gathering as a community to listen to the word of God and to share the Eucharist. In the early years of Christianity, when Sunday was still a work day, Christians gathered in the morning for a liturgy of the Word and sometimes a baptism, and in the evening to share the primary meal of the day and celebrate the Eucharist. After a short while the practice of sharing a meal before the Eucharist disappeared, but the separate services remained. In fact, by the fifth century, Sunday worship in the major Christian centers such as Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, and Constantinople consisted of a series of services which took up most of the day and were parceled throughout the entire city. Very few people actually attended every piece of the Sunday worship, but the series of services shaped the day and even the Christian sense of time itself.

Sunday Eucharist remains the foundation and heart of Catholic life. When we participate in the communal celebration of Sunday Mass, we give a public testimony of belonging and being faithful to Christ and to his Church. Church law requires Catholics to go to Mass on Sundays and all holy days, or on the evening preceding either. This obligation is a serious one. Those who deliberately miss Mass commit a grave sin. Only valid excuses like being ill or having to care for an infant or being excused by a pastor free a person from this obligation.

The Second Vatican Council said that Sunday is "the original feast day." It should be a day of joy and freedom from work (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 106). The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that "On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are to refrain from engaging in work or activities that hinder the worship owed to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, the performance of the works of mercy, and the appropriate relaxation of mind and body (2185).

To accomplish this, we must spend Sunday relaxing, spending time with our families, visiting older relatives or neighbors, and doing charitable works for those in need: the elderly, poor, and sick. Also appropriate as activities are things that refresh our mind like meditating, reading, and taking a walk in nature. Some Catholics, because of their jobs (e.g., medical, retail, and the like) have to work on Sundays. However, they, too, should set aside time for prayer, reflection, and rest. Christians especially should take care to not make unnecessary demands on others that would keep them from resting on the Lord's Day.

The Sabbath: A weekly commemoration of God's work in creation has always been one of the defining elements of Judaism and Christianity. For Jews, the

Sabbath is Saturday. Jews are called to make every seventh day holy, to set it aside as a day to rest from ordinary activity and focus their energy on God. As they structure their week around the Sabbath they begin to understand that all time belongs to God and that God's agenda and not our own is what matters not only in the long term but also in the day to day.

The Sabbath exists because God rested on the seventh day of creation. Because its roots are in the creation story, the Sabbath draws our attention to that story. The Sabbath is a reminder that God created us out of love. It is also a reminder that God invites us to join him in the work of creation and to return love to God by loving one another and by caring for his world. The Sabbath is to be a day of rest for all people, rich and poor alike. It provides a means for caring for those who are weaker than we are, and it reminds us that God has cared for us in our weakness.

Easter: Easter was the first annual feast celebrated by the early Church. Because the first Christians maintained aspects of Jewish practice, and because they expected the imminent return of Christ, at first there was no need for a separate calendar which would carry them from year to year. There is evidence in the New Testament, however, that the earliest Christians did observe an annual remembrance of the Resurrection. For example, in his first letter to the Corinthians (5:7-8) Paul seems to indicate that Christians had reinterpreted the festival of Passover. It seems likely that, during the days when the Jewish community celebrated Passover, the Christians also celebrated, but with a focus on Christ as the Paschal lamb. In fact the Greek word for Easter was pascha, a translation of the Hebrew word for Passover.

There is much evidence over the second and third centuries that Christians celebrated Easter each year. Around the middle of the second century, a homily preached by a Church Father named Melito of Sardis (in present day Turkey), described the structure of the Pascha. It lasted from sunset to midnight and consisted of fasting, Scripture reading, chanting, and the Eucharist.

A controversy developed in the second century about when Easter should be celebrated. Some parts of the Church observed it according to the Jewish calendar at the same time as Passover. This was the fourteenth day of the Jewish month called Nisan. In other parts of the Church Easter was celebrated on the Sunday following Passover.

The matter was resolved by the Council of Nicea in 325 at which it was agreed that Easter should be celebrated on the Sunday following the first full moon after the

Spring equinox (the first day of spring). That is how we calculate the date for Easter today.

By the end of the fourth century the annual Easter celebration was divided into several days to better reflect the historical events of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. The Church's practice in Jerusalem was very influential and spread throughout the Roman Empire. Holy Thursday marked the Last Supper and the arrest of Jesus. Good Friday commemorated his crucifixion and death. The Easter Vigil service began in a dark Church, the sign of the chaos that existed before creation and of the darkness of despair when Christ was in the tomb.

The first week of the Easter season was of particular importance in the early Church. St. Augustine (d. 430) described it as a time when the faithful did not work, but instead celebrated the liturgy daily and helped introduce the newly baptized into the mysteries of the faith, particularly the sacraments.

The annual celebration of the Easter Triduum, which reaches its climax at the Easter Vigil, is the focal point of the Church's calendar. Easter is the feast of feasts. The liturgical year truly becomes a "year of the Lord's favor" as the light of the resurrection pours out from the celebration of Easter and fills the year with its brilliance. As the words of the Exultet - the Easter proclamation sung at the vigil - proclaim: "This is our Passover feast, when Christ, the true Lamb, is slain.... This is the night when first you saved our fathers: you freed the people of Israel from their slavery and led them dry-shod through the sea. , This is the night when the pillar of fire destroyed the darkness of sin! This is the night when Christians everywhere. .. are restored to grace and grow together in holiness. This is the night when Jesus Christ broke the chains of death and rose triumphant from the grave.. .. Of this night scripture says: "the night will be as clear as day: it will become my light, my joy. "The power of this holy night dispels all evil, washes guilt away, restores lost innocence, brings mourners joy; it casts out hatred, brings us peace, and humbles earthly pride (from the Easter vigil liturgy, emphasis added).

The fifty day period after Easter is called the Easter Season and it is one of the holiest seasons of the liturgical year. We celebrate the Eucharist with the joy of the first disciples who recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread. During the Easter season we fulfill what has traditionally been called our "Easter duty." "Prepared by the sacrament of Reconciliation, [we] receive the Eucharist at least once a year, if possible during the Easter season" (CCC, 1389).

The Easter season is crowned with the celebration of the Ascension of Christ into heaven, forty days after Easter on Ascension Thursday, and Pentecost, fifty days after Easter, the day on which the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles. Pentecost is called the "birthday" of the Church. The Easter season invites us to immerse ourselves and our lives into the Paschal mystery, to make our whole lives a celebration of God's grace.

Lent: We cannot celebrate Easter fully if we have not taken the time to prepare for the celebration. We cannot be restored if we have not taken the time to identify the ways in which we are broken. By the second century Christians were preparing for the Easter celebration with a two-day (forty-hour) fast. No one within the community was to take food or water during the hours that Christ was in the tomb. Also, during the same time, Lent developed as a forty-day period of preparation for those who were to be baptized at Easter. Catechumens were to fast with just one meal per day for forty days in imitation of the forty days that Jesus spent in the wilderness.

This fast was seen as having several purposes. First, people believed that fasting gave fervor to prayers, strengthened them to fight against evil and helped prepare them for the reception of the Holy Spirit. Second, fasting allowed one to give money to the poor that would otherwise be used for food. For many fasting was a response of love. The rest of the Church participated in the fast as a way of supporting the catechumens and as a way, doing penance for their sins and recommitting themselves to their own baptism.

In some parts of the early Church, Lent - the word means "springtime" - was the appropriate time for those guilty of serious sin to complete their process of reconciliation. At the beginning of Lent those who were called penitents would put on special garments. They would be sprinkled with ashes and then be solemnly expelled from the Church. They would not be able to participate in the prayers of the faithful or the Eucharist until they were solemnly reconciled with the Church on Holy Thursday.

The Lenten season originally began on the sixth Sunday before Easter and ended with the celebration of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday. Because there was no fasting on Sundays, the Church of the fifth century decided that six more days should be added to Lent in order to have forty fast days. To accomplish this, Good Friday and Holy Saturday were separated from the Easter Triduum and added to Lent and the four days preceding the sixth Sunday before Easter were also added. Thus Ash Wednesday was born as the first day of the season of penance.

When the practice of expelling serious sinners at the beginning of Lent and restoring them to the Church at the end of Lent faded out of existence at the end of the first millennium, the practice of sprinkling ashes was retained for all the faithful.

Today, Lent is seen as a time of conversion with a threefold emphasis on prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. We seek a greater openness to the word of God, a more complete participation in the liturgy, and a stronger commitment to works of charity (almsgiving). Our practice of fasting (not eating) and abstinence (giving up certain foods or behaviors) is designed to turn our hearts to God and remind us of the plight of those who are hungry. During Lent we abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday, and on every Friday including Good Friday. On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday we also fast between meals. Today's Lenten season extends from Ash 1 Wednesday to the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday. It is forty-four days long if Sundays are included and thirty-eight days if they are not.

Christmas: In the first two centuries, the entire Christian story was viewed by the Church as a part of the Easter celebration. Gradually, however, people began to celebrate different aspects of Christ's saving work on independent feast days. The Eastern Church (centered in Constantinople) began to celebrate Epiphany as the feast of Christ's birth, the visit of the magi, his baptism, and his first miracle all in one while marking the fact that God had revealed himself to the world. The word epiphany means "revelation" or "showing forth." The dating of Epiphany to January 6 seems to have had its roots in the popular belief that Jesus was conceived on the date of his death. His death was widely held to be April 6, and January 6 is exactly nine months later.

In the Western Church, there is evidence that by 336 Christmas day was being celebrated on December 25. There are two theories about this date for Christmas. One is that this was the date for the pagan festival of the Unconquered Sun. According to many scholars the Church introduced the celebration of the Incarnation on this day to help Christians understand that Christ is the true light that has come into the world, the "sun of justice" mentioned in Malachi 3:20. By Celebrating Christ's birth on the day of the pagan festival Christians could proclaim that their feast celebrated the only true unconquered Son who alone can give light and bring salvation to the world.

The second theory relates to early Christian theologians being inclined to pay particular attention to equinoxes and solstices. For example some believed that John the Baptist was conceived at the autumn equinox and born at the summer

solstice. Since Luke 1:26 reports that Jesus was conceived six months after John, he would have been conceived at the spring equinox (March 25) and therefore born on December 25.

For Christians of the third and fourth century it made perfect sense for God to choose the winter solstice as the day of Christ's birth; on the darkest day of the year God sent the Light to the world. Christians came to understand the winter solstice, in light of the Incarnation. The solstice became a reminder of the true light which came into the world in Christ and which gave us hope even in the midst of darkness. The Christian observance of Christmas put the solstice at the service of God.

Near the end of the fourth century the Eastern Church and Western Church began to celebrate the events surrounding Jesus' birth on both December 25 and January 6. December 25 became the day for the whole Church to celebrate Jesus' birth and January 6 became the day to celebrate his baptism and his first miracle at Cana. The coming of the Magi was celebrated in the East on December 25 and on January 6 in the West.

Advent: Advent as a season of preparation for Christmas seems to have developed in the East during the fifth century. It may have begun as a forty-day fast for those who were preparing for their own baptism to be celebrated on the day of Christ's baptism. At the end of the sixth century the Advent Masses for the city of Rome focused on the Incarnation of Christ and preparation for the celebration of Christmas.

In other regions, particularly in Gaul, Advent became a time of preparation for Christ's second coming. The Irish missionaries in Gaul tended to emphasize the fact that Christ would come again to judge the people, pointing out the importance of preparing through penance. By the twelfth century some of the penitential characteristics of the Gaelic Advent liturgies had made their way into Rome, resulting in the elimination of the Gloria from the liturgy and the wearing of purple vestments.

Today Advent is viewed in two ways. The first two weeks of Advent direct our minds to the second coming of Christ and the time when God "will wipe every tear from our eyes" (Rv 21:4). It is thus a season of joyful and spiritual expectation. The Gloria is still omitted during the Advent liturgies, but this is not because we are mourning our sin, but rather in order that the song of the angels might ring out in all its newness on Christmas.

The elimination of the Gloria during Advent draws our attention to a second important characteristic of the season: Advent is a time to prepare to celebrate in the Church, dearth and report Christmas. It is not a time to begin celebrating Christmas. During the Sundays of Advent we focus on the fact that without Christ we would be in darkness. We also reflect upon the promises that God made which were fulfilled when Jesus entered the world. During the season of Advent we live in spirit with those who were relying on God's promise to send a Savior. When we celebrate the coming of that Savior at Christmas we find new confidence in God's faithfulness.

Ordinary Time: The Easter cycle, which goes from Ash Wednesday to Pentecost, and the Christmas cycle, which goes from the first Sunday of Advent until the feast of Christ's baptism on the Sunday after Epiphany, are the supporting pillars of the liturgical year. During the other weeks of the year "the mystery of Christ in all its fullness is celebrated." (General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar, #43). These weeks are referred to as "ordinary time." During this time of the liturgical years the Sundays are counted (e.g., The Third Sunday of Ordinary Time). The word "ordinary" refers to the numbers, as in ordinal numbers.

Ordinary time has thirty-three or thirty-four Sundays, depending upon the total number of Sundays in a given year. In years with only thirty-three Sundays in ordinary time, a week is omitted between the Sunday of ordinary time immediately before Ash Wednesday and the Sunday immediately after Pentecost. The last Sunday of the year - whether it be the thirty-third or thirty-fourth Sunday - is never eliminated because the readings for that day focus on the second coming and are necessary to finish the liturgical year and lead the Church into Advent. This last Sunday is the celebration of the feast of Christ the King.

Ordinary time is punctuated by numerous feast days. Over time the Christian calendar came to include feasts to remember events in the life of Mary and memorials of martyrs and saints. Several of the Marian feasts have very ancient roots. The earliest Marian feast began some time before the council of Ephesus which was held in 431. It was the "commemoration of the holy, ever-virgin mother of God" which was celebrated on December 26 in the East. The Assumption of Mary was a feast commemorating Mary's death or her "falling asleep." It was extended to the entire Byzantine Empire in the sixth century. The Feast of the Annunciation on March 25 was also being celebrated by the middle of the sixth century in the East and the seventh century in the West. The Feast of the Immaculate Conception (the conception of %Mary) was first celebrated around 700 in the East. The mystery of the Immaculate Conception was officially named a dogma of the Church on December 8, 1854, by Pope Pius IX.

Each of these feasts celebrates the incredible love of God for his people and the grace which God offers to those who will receive it. In his encyclical *Marialis Cultus*, Pope Paul VI stressed the fact that celebrations and devotions which honor Mary should draw our minds and hearts to Christ and to the Trinity. "The ultimate purpose of devotion to the Blessed Virgin is to glorify God and lead Christians to commit themselves to a life which conforms absolutely to his will" (#39).

As for the saints, according to the Constitution on the Liturgy, "the feasts of the saints proclaim the wonderful works of Christ in his servants and offer to the faithful fitting examples for their imitation" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 111). The Solemnity of All Saints on November 1 has its origins in the East where a memorial of all the martyrs was celebrated as early as the fourth century. '

The other feast days which punctuate ordinary time draw our attention to particular truths of the faith. These feasts began to appear in the Middle Ages as a way of helping people to grasp particular teachings. Many are still celebrated today, like the Solemnity of the Trinity, Corpus Christi, the feast of the Sacred Heart, Christ the King, and the feast of the Holy Family.

The liturgical year helps us to relive the key points in salvation history and make them our own. There is no end to the things that God will reveal to us throughout the year. For this reason the liturgical year is a constant source of grace for the Church. The liturgical year calls us to look beyond ourselves and the things that we do and to focus our attention on the things that God has done and is doing. The Christian calendar offers balance to the calendars of our daily lives and all the things we "have to do." It reminds us that we are able to do what we do only because of what God has done for us. As we live through the great events of salvation history we are challenged to examine our priorities in light of God's plans and not just our own.

The Liturgy of the Hours: Both the Sunday celebration of the Mass and the annual unfolding the Paschal mystery through the course of the liturgical year focus on the wonderful things that God has done for us. They help us open our hearts and prepare our lives so that we can receive the gift which God is offering us. Once we have received that gift we cannot help responding with prayers of praise. The liturgy of the hours - the daily public prayer of the Church - is the praise of the community offered to God in the midst of our daily lives. It is the prayer of a people whose lives are being shaped by what God has done and is doing.

The liturgy of the hours is modeled at least in part on the daily prayers of Judaism. When Jesus lived, faithful Jews set aside specific times of the day for prayer in the morning and evening, and also during the third, sixth, and ninth hours of the day (9:00, 12:00, 3:00). The early Christians continued the practice of praying at these times of day. The morning and evening prayer, however, ceased to be private. Christians in the early Church would gather publicly for prayer and praise each day before and after work. This practice was described by Hippolytus around the year 217 and continued to grow and spread for the next century or so.

By the sixth century, however, morning and evening prayer had become an almost exclusively monastic practice. Later all priests took up the practice of praying the divine office, another term to describe the liturgy of the hours. Today, all Catholics are encouraged to pray the liturgy of the hours making it not only the official prayer of the Church, but truly a prayer for the entire people of God.

The praying of the liturgy of the hours is a way of being faithful to the instruction to pray constantly. It is structured primarily around the psalms - the most ancient prayer of the Church. All of the faithful are called to join in the celebration of the liturgy of the hours, to pray with one voice in praise and thanksgiving for the wonders God is working in our midst. Praying the liturgy of the hours makes our connection with the entire body of Christ grow stronger. Over time we will feel less and less conflict between what we want and what Christ wants for us.

Diversity Within the Unity of Liturgy: The liturgy is celebrated in every corner of the world in a variety of liturgical rites that reflect the diverse cultures from which they come. As the Catechism teaches, "The mystery of Christ is so unfathomably rich that it cannot be exhausted by any single liturgical tradition" (1201). Today, the Church approves of the following liturgical rites, all of which have equal dignity: Latin (principally the Roman rite, but also the rites of certain local churches, such as the Ambrosian rite, or those of certain religious orders), Byzantine, Alexandrian or Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Maronite, and Chaldean.

How did these different liturgical traditions arise? The liturgical traditions arose due to the Church's mission of sharing the gospel with all people, all cultures, and in all places. The Church is open to adapting the liturgy to reflect the differences in culture, but only if attention is also paid to maintaining the unity of fidelity with Tradition, professing the same faith, receiving the same sacraments as derived from apostolic succession, and remaining obedient to the Pope.

There are certain parts of the liturgy that cannot be changed because they are divinely instituted. (For example, the words of institution of the Eucharist, spoken by Christ, cannot be changed.) The Church is the guardian of these parts. Other parts of the liturgy can change, especially when change arises from the Church's participation in a local culture, particularly the culture of a recently evangelized people. But the degree and the pace of change in the liturgy are always measured by their fidelity to the faith and the impact they will have on the unity of the Church.

The Second Vatican Council said that the Church respects and fosters the qualities and the talents of the various races and peoples. Anything in these peoples' way of life which is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error, she studies with sympathy, and, if possible, preserves intact. Sometimes, in fact, she admits such things into the liturgy itself so long as they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 37).

Today no matter where you go in the world, if you join in the Sunday celebration of Eucharist in a Roman Catholic Church, you will do essentially the same thing, say essentially the same prayers, and hear the same scripture readings.

This uniformity accomplishes two very important things. First, it ensures that over the course of time we will share in the unfolding of the entire Paschal mystery. Our lives will be shaped by the entire Christ event and* not simply by those things which are favorites for our parish, pastor, or liturgy committee. Second, the uniformity of the liturgy helps to unite many and diverse people from all over the world. This uniformity allows us to be at home with one another in worship even if we have never met, and even if we do not speak the same language. The German bishops have said that Sunday breaks through the isolation from which so many people suffer today.

Other Liturgical Rites Within the Catholic Church: All of the lawfully recognized rites of the Church are of equal dignity. They celebrate the same mystery but in different ways. No one is in any way better than any of the others. These diverse rites exist as expressions of particular cultures. They make it possible for the people of those cultures to understand and participate more completely in the Paschal mystery. We call the Church "catholic" because it speaks to all people in all places in ways that they can understand. For this reason the Church works to integrate the local culture into its liturgical worship in a way that preserves that culture while at the same time ensuring that the universal faith of the Church will not be misunderstood in any way.

How do we know that there is unity amid this diversity? It is because the Churches that celebrate these rites adhere to the same faith as expressed in the Nicene Creed (which we recite-at Mass), celebrate the same sacraments, and are led by bishops who are ordained by the valid successors of the apostles. The Catechism outlines it in this way: The criterion that assures unity amid the diversity of liturgical traditions is fidelity to apostolic Tradition, i.e. the communion in faith and the sacraments received from the apostles, a communion that is both signified and guaranteed by apostolic succession (1209).

Our worship shapes what we believe. It orchestrates much of our experience of God and prepares us to receive the grace that God is offering us. The elements which are part of our worship today are those which have been deemed necessary for accomplishing the work which God wants us to do. Each element of our liturgy has the power to shape us if we allow it to do so. Each piece of the liturgy is there to open a window into the mystery of God.

Where Is the Liturgy Celebrated?: The liturgy is not tied to any one place. In many parts of the world, the absence of religious freedom prohibits the presence of churches. Similarly, in the first three centuries of the Church, Roman persecution prohibited the building of any places for divine worship. However, when religious liberty is not limited, Christians do construct buildings for worship. These churches signify and make visible the larger Church in this particular place. They also are a house of prayer:

- in which the Eucharist is celebrated and reserved;
- where the faithful assemble;
- and where Christ, our Savior, offered for us on a sacrificial altar is worshiped.

The inside of a Catholic church contains several elements that are key to liturgy. These include the following:

Altar. The altar is placed at the center of the sanctuary because this is where Christ's sacrifice of the Cross is made present. The altar is also the table of the Lord to which the community of faith is invited. The altar is symbolic of Christ's presence. The priest kisses the altar at the beginning of Mass.

Tabernacle. The tabernacle is the case or box that contains the Blessed Sacrament, the consecrated hosts. It is located in a place of great honor in the church. A tabernacle light burns near it as a sign of Jesus' real presence there.

Presider's chair. The chair of the bishop (cathedra) or priest is placed in the sanctuary to express his role in presiding over the assembly and directing the prayer.

Lectern (ambo). The proclamation of the Word of God requires a suitable place. The lectern may be of simple or elaborate design as long as the attention of the people may easily be directed there during the liturgy of the Word.

Holy oils. The holy oils which include the oil of catechumens, oil for the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, and the sacred chrism, which is used to consecrate a person in the Holy Spirit in the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders are kept in a sacred place called the ambry.

Baptistery. A parish church must have a place for the celebration of Baptism. The baptistery may be located in several different places in the church. In some churches it is near the entrance to symbolize the entrance of the person into the Church. In others it is near the altar. In still others it is in a separate place in the side of the church. The church must also have holy water fonts to allow Catholics to remember their baptismal promises.

Reconciliation Chapel. In previous times, places for the sacrament of Penance were known as "confessionals," Today, these are open areas to receive penitents that also offer the opportunity for private confessions.

A church must also be a space that lends itself to quiet and reflective prayer to accompany the Eucharist. A church also has an "other-world" significance. When we enter a church we symbolically pass from the world wounded by sin to the world of new Life in Christ that we are all called to.