

Liturgy 101

Sacraments and Sacramentals

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Foreword

Very little, if anything, in this book is original. That is not to say that I do not have original thoughts. I do, and some of them have been published elsewhere. The purpose of this book, however, is not to present my own thoughts or opinions. The purpose is to introduce interested readers to the teachings of the Catholic Church about liturgy—and, more specifically, about the seven sacraments. By the grace of God, my opinions are in alignment with the faith of the Church as articulated by the magisterium, as well as by many holy saints and doctors. My hope is that the reader will come to know better, appreciate more deeply, and love more fervently the gifts that God gives in the seven sacraments.

This book presents the basics of Catholic teachings about the sacraments. I highly recommend that readers pursue additional self-formation in the sacraments using the sources listed in the “further reading” section following each of the chapters. These sources include the Bible, documents written by popes, councils, and various congregations of the Roman Curia, as well as the official liturgical rites of the Catholic Church. Nearly all of these sources are available on the Internet. With the posting of official Church documents on the Internet, those interested in exploring the Catholic faith and its teachings can immediately access many once difficult-to-obtain sources. In each chapter, I have abbreviated names of the sources cited; the abbreviations are spelled out at the end of the chapter.

Over the past decade, I have taught classes on liturgy and the sacraments to undergraduate and graduate students, adults seeking continuing education, permanent diaconate candidates, and seminarians. These students have been enrolled in programs offered

through Ave Maria College, The Institute for Pastoral Theology, the Paul VI Pontifical Institute for Catechetical and Pastoral Studies, the Diocese of Tulsa, Mundelein Seminary, and Kenrick-Glennon Seminary. For these students, I developed the teaching materials that provided the foundation for this book.

My dear wife, Laura, has unflaggingly encouraged me to write this book. I also thank my mother-in-law, Sarah Jane. Her visits—alas, all too brief—and assistance with our six children afforded me crucial time to complete this manuscript. She also read several of the chapters and helped me clarify a number of passages.

My sincerest gratitude goes to colleagues and friends who have read and commented on this book. Edward N. Peters helped me improve the text by carefully reviewing and rigorously commenting on most of the manuscript. Samuel F. Weber, OSB, read through the entire manuscript and offered a number of helpful recommendations. James Baur provided encouraging feedback on drafts of several chapters. C. Eugene Morris provided comments on the first two chapters; Kristian Teater reviewed drafts of four chapters; Edward Richard reviewed the chapter on penance; Robert Fastiggi, the chapter on holy orders; and John Gresham, the chapter on matrimony.

Father John J. Steger died in 2008 after 55 years of tirelessly serving as a parish priest in upstate New York. He baptized hundreds of babies and administered first penance and holy Communion to countless children, including the author of this book. Through the powerful example of Father Steger's selfless, long-suffering perseverance, the Lord has kept me on the path of faith that has brought me to the moment that I write these words of dedication. May the almighty Lord grant him *locum refrigerii, lucis et pacis*—an abode of refreshment, light, and peace.

AT SAINT LOUIS, ON THE FEAST OF SAINT BASIL THE GREAT, 2010
GLORY BE TO THE FATHER, AND TO THE SON, AND TO THE HOLY SPIRIT



CHAPTER 1

Words About Worship

Because words such as “liturgy” and “sacrament” mean different things in different contexts, a brief explanation of the fundamental terms and concepts is helpful before addressing the Church’s theology and practice of liturgy and the sacraments. This first chapter sets forth the basic understandings of several key terms that will appear in subsequent chapters: liturgy, sacrament, participation, Rite (with an uppercase “R”), rite (lowercase “r”), ordinary, and extraordinary.

LITURGY

Liturgy started its long career as a term for worship in the pages of sacred Scripture. In the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament—known as the *Septuagint*—the words from which liturgy is derived (the verb *leitourgein* and the noun *leitourgia*) occur roughly one hundred times. Liturgy emerges as a technical term for the service or ministry performed by priests in ancient Israel when they offered sacrifices to the Lord. In the New Testament, the Greek word for liturgy continues to designate the priest’s ministry (Luke 1:23). The term is especially important to the author of Hebrews,

who writes that a priest of the old covenant is constantly engaged in the liturgy, “offering frequently those same sacrifices that can never take away sins” (Hebrews 10:11).

By contrast, Christ the High Priest of the new covenant performs a more excellent liturgy (Hebrews 8:6). Christ offers the one single sacrifice of his own blood on the cross, by which “he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated” (Hebrews 10:14; see also 9:14). In light of these passages from the New Testament, early Greek-speaking Christians naturally used the word “liturgy” to indicate the offering of the one sacrifice of Christ in the Eucharist at the hands of ordained Christian priests. The term “liturgy” also has a broader but related meaning in several other New Testament passages. In some instances, it is used to designate a general spiritual service performed by faithful Christians—either a service of worship (Acts 13:2) or of charity (Romans 15:27; 2 Corinthians 9:12).

The Christian tradition also employs more general words to describe divine worship. From ancient times, Greek Christians used the word *latría* to indicate the worship that is due to God alone. In fact, *latría* survives as a technical term for “the adoration given to God alone” in Catholic catechesis to this day (CCCC 286). Saint Augustine of Hippo (d. 430) noted that *latría* is usually translated into Latin as service (*servitus*), although no Latin term conveyed the meaning of the Greek word *latría*. Other possible contenders he discussed include cult (*cultus*), religion (*religio*), and piety (*pietas*), but none of these has the precise meaning of *latría*.

In the Middle Ages, Latin authors described what would today be called liturgy with such words as duty (*munus*), ministry (*ministerium*), service (*servitus*), office (*officium*), and cult (*cultus*). A book about the liturgy would have been titled *A Treatise on the Offices* in past centuries. “Cult” still appears today in the Latin title of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments—which might more literally be called the Congregation for

Divine Cult (*de culto divino*). The Congregation for Divine Worship (CDW) is the dicastery or office of the Roman Curia, which still teaches and legislates in the area of Catholic liturgy. One can readily understand why the Church avoids using the English word cult in the dicastery's title. It has negative connotations, evoking images of secretive religious groups engaged in strange or subversive activities. By contrast, Christian worship is a public affair.

The Catholic Church began to employ the word liturgy on a regular basis in the twentieth century. Drawing from the rich biblical tradition discussed above, Pope Pius XII in 1947 defined sacred liturgy in his splendid encyclical on the topic, titled *Mediator Dei*, as follows:

[T]he public worship which our Redeemer as Head of the Church renders to the Father, as well as the worship which the community of the faithful renders to its Founder, and through Him to the heavenly Father. It is, in short, the worship rendered by the Mystical Body of Christ in the entirety of its Head and members. (MD 20)

Elsewhere in the encyclical, Pope Pius XII pinpoints the passion and death of Christ the Redeemer on the cross as the key moment of this worship. On the cross, Christ is the priest who offers the sacrifice, as well as the sacrificial victim who is offered. The entire Church, the entire body of Christ, is involved in this self-offering: Christ as the head of the body, and the faithful as members.

Pope Pius XII's practical understanding of liturgy is rather broad. In his encyclical on the sacred liturgy, he addresses the following topics: the sacraments (first and foremost, the Eucharist), worship of the Eucharist, personal preparation for celebrating the sacraments, and the Divine Office or Liturgy of the Hours. Closely related topics the pope also considers include the yearly cycle of feasts of the Lord and feasts of the saints, personal piety, Church decoration, and Gregorian chant.

SACRAMENT: FROM BIBLICAL ROOTS TO A DEVELOPED DEFINITION

As discussed above, “liturgy” originates from a Greek word. “Sacrament,” on the other hand, originates from the Latin word *sacramentum*. Sacrament had no exact Greek equivalent. In the Roman Empire at the time that Christianity emerged, “sacrament” indicated the oath of loyalty unto death that Roman soldiers swore to the emperor and one another. The earliest Latin-speaking Christians soon adapted this powerful word, infusing it with their own meaning.

This development of Christian Latin vocabulary occurs in the earliest Latin translations of the Bible—especially in the version known as the Vulgate. The Vulgate is the standard Latin edition of Scripture that has been used in the Western Church since the fifth century. The Vulgate employs the word “sacrament” on fifteen occasions—six of which appear in the books of Daniel and Revelation (Daniel 2:18; 2:30; 2:47; 4:6; Revelation 1:20; 17:7). These apocalyptic books depict visions wherein the seers Daniel and John symbolically witness events that will take place at the end of time. The sacrament in each of these passages is some hidden mystery that is revealed to the seer in a way that does not necessarily make it clearer: through signs and symbols. Examples of this include the giant statue in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, and the seven stars and seven candles in John’s visions.

Two elements tie these notions of sacrament together. First, something is being revealed about the divine plan concerning world-shattering events; second, the manner in which that something is revealed is not obvious, but requires interpretation. From ancient Latin versions of the Bible, sacrament emerges as a sign of God’s plan that is made manifest and given meaning in Christ—all the while maintaining a hidden or mysterious character.

From the late second century, Latin Christians applied the term sacrament to the most significant liturgical celebrations of the

Church, such as baptism and the Eucharist. Greek-speaking Christians designate these same celebrations as “mysteries.” The word also continued to be used in a broader sense to indicate the mysteries of God’s revelation in general. This book is concerned with the more specific definition of sacrament that develops with the guidance of the Holy Spirit within the Christian tradition. This definition is the fruit of believers’ efforts to understand the mysterious content and the effect of seven central rites of worship.

Following centuries of theological reflection, the elements of a more precise definition of sacrament emerged in the works of such luminaries as Hugh of Saint Victor (d. 1141) and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153). The popular Roman Catechism of the sixteenth century concisely expressed this meaning with words that remain clear and useful to this day: “A Sacrament is a visible sign of an invisible grace, instituted for our justification.” Each element of this definition must be examined in order to better understand what a sacrament is and what it does.

INSTITUTED: DIVINE INITIATIVES

“Wisdom has built her house, she has set up her seven columns” (Proverbs 9:1). The fathers and doctors of the Church always have recognized “Wisdom” as the Son of God, who became incarnate as Jesus Christ, the Son of Mary. The house that Christ has built is the Church, and the seven pillars that sustain the house are the sacraments.

Why God endows the number seven with such significance is a mystery, but the number’s importance is evident throughout Scripture. God creates the world in six days, and rests on the seventh. The Christian is re-created and sustained by God’s grace through the six sacraments, and the seventh prepares for the journey to eternal rest in heaven. When the Flood destroyed the sinful inhabitants of the earth, God saved Noah and seven other people (2 Peter 2:5) on

the ark, along with seven pairs of every clean animal. Christians—whose sins are destroyed in the waters of baptism—are saved by the seven sacraments of Christ and the Church. The Church, as the ark or bark of Peter, carries the faithful through the storms of the worldly tribulations and temptations to the safe port of her heavenly homeland.

The ancient Israelites observed seven annual feasts for seven days each, and they also celebrated weddings for seven days (Judges 14:17). It took Solomon seven years to build the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6:38). Turning to the New Testament, after Jesus feeds four thousand men with seven loaves and a few fish, seven baskets of fragments remain (Matthew 15:34–38). Christians have commonly seen these loaves and fish as symbols of the sacraments, beginning with the first appearance of Christian art in the Roman catacombs.

The number seven continues to enjoy preeminence in the worship of the new covenant through the seven sacraments. Like the feasts of the Old Testament, the seven sacraments of the New Testament are divinely instituted—that is, God established them, determined their essential shape, and endowed them with power. Whereas God instituted the worship of the Old Testament or the Old Law through Moses (John 1:17; 7:19), our Lord Jesus Christ himself instituted the seven sacraments of the New Covenant. Christ established them, determined their essential shape, and endowed them with power through his blood (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; Hebrews 12:24)—that is, in his sacrifice on the cross.

Finally, Christ entrusted the sacraments to the Church for the sanctification of the faithful “in his blood,” to use once again the language of sacred Scripture (Hebrews 13:12; 1 John 1:7; Ephesians 1:7). Therefore Christ, the High Priest of the New Covenant, is both the historical source of the Church’s sacraments and the source of their power, which derives from his passion, death, and resurrection. Not invented or discovered by human beings, the sacraments

make sense only as an integral part of God's plan for saving humanity through Christ.

The sacraments belong to the Church in a twofold manner. First, the sacraments are for the Church insofar as they bring the Church into existence and sanctify her members. Second, the sacraments are by the Church insofar as Christ chooses, with the power of the Holy Spirit, to work through the Church to make the sacraments effective. The Church, in turn, expresses faith in Christ through the sacraments. Yet the sacraments are not merely expressions of faith that presuppose faith; they also nourish and strengthen faith (CCC 1123).

Therefore when considering any sacrament, the first question to ask is how Christ instituted it and entrusted it to the Church. The chapters of this book will address the scriptural foundations of each sacrament, as established by Christ.

A VISIBLE SIGN: THE ESSENTIAL RITE

The next central concept regarding any sacrament is its essential rite. Each of the seven sacraments is marked by an essential rite, without which the sacrament cannot exist. The essential rite is a tangible sign—it can be experienced through one or more of the five senses. It can be heard, seen, felt, smelled, or tasted. The essential rite includes four exterior elements: matter, form, minister, and recipient.

The matter of a sacrament includes both a physical or sensorial element, as well as the action with which it is applied. For example, in baptism the physical element is water. Yet water sitting in a font does not make a sacrament. The water must be applied to a catechumen or an infant who is presented for baptism. Furthermore, the purpose of the application of the physical object must be specified by the form or verbal formula. In the case of baptism, the form is: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." By contrast, if a mother pours water on her baby three times saying, "I am going to get that applesauce off you," no sacra-

ment takes place. The form determines the purpose of the use of the physical element. Therefore the form also is part of the essential rite.

The proper minister and recipient also are necessary elements of each sacrament. For a sacrament to be valid, both the minister and the recipient must be live human beings. Fido the dog can neither baptize, nor can he be baptized. An angel cannot administer, nor can a corpse receive, any sacrament. When celebrating a sacrament, the minister must intend to do what the Church does in that sacrament. This is not the same as intending to do what the Church intends. To intend, or fully understand, the mystery of a sacrament is not required on the part of a given minister. Only ordained bishops and priests can minister the sacraments of confirmation, the Eucharist, penance or reconciliation, anointing of the sick, and holy orders. Anyone, however, can administer baptism: this includes deacons, lay people, and even non-Catholics when necessary.

The question of the recipient or beneficiary of a sacrament is similar. Some people cannot receive certain sacraments. For example, someone who already has been baptized cannot be baptized again. Furthermore, someone not yet baptized cannot receive any of the other six sacraments.

The celebration of a sacrament typically includes many words, gestures, and even objects that are not part of the essential rite, as well as people who are neither ministers nor recipients. The essential rite of baptism, for example, is accompanied by readings and prayers, along with the use of objects such as oil, candles, and white garments. Known as sacramentals, these clothe the essential rite with additional dignity, educate those present about the effects of the sacrament, and excite the minds of the faithful to contemplate God's gift of grace through the sacrament. Nonetheless, sacramentals are not absolutely necessary or essential parts of the sacrament. Whereas the essential rite of each sacrament is instituted by Christ, the Church establishes the sacramentals that surround the essential

rite. Why? To promote participation, devotion, and reverence on the part of the faithful. Except in cases of urgent necessity, no minister may omit these sacramentals.

All elements of the essential rite of a sacrament must be present in order for the sacrament to be valid. If part of the essential rite is missing, a sacrament is said to be invalid. If a sacrament is celebrated with all its sacramentals as indicated by the Church in the appropriate liturgical books, it is said to be licit or properly celebrated according to the Church's prescriptions. If some of the sacramentals are missing, the celebration may be illicit or not properly conducted, but still valid.

AN INVISIBLE GRACE. . .FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION

Through the tangible sign of a sacrament, Christ always offers an invisible gift of grace. This grace is for the sake of the salvation of the faithful. The ultimate cause of a Christian's justification is the passion, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Since salvation comes only through the passion, the grace of the sacraments draws the Christian near to the cross, enabling each of Christ's faithful to benefit personally from the infinite fruits of Christ's one perfect sacrifice.

Sacraments are valid and offer grace *ex opere operato*, to use a classical phrase of Latin theology. In other words, sacraments operate by the power of the complete sacramental rite. When the necessary matter and form coincide with a minister and recipient who possess sufficient intention, the sacrament is necessarily present and grace is infallibly offered. Catholics may take great comfort in the fact that God offers grace in the sacraments *ex opere operato*, since this kind of efficacy works regardless of the personal piety of a minister. For example, even a priest guilty of mortal sin can validly minister the sacrament of the Eucharist. So Catholics need not worry about the personal state or the piety of a given minister when they

approach one of the seven sacraments; the grace of Christ is infallibly offered in the sacrament *ex opere operato*.

Through the sacraments, according to the Council of Trent, “all true justice either begins, or being begun is increased, or being lost is restored” (CT 7). The sanctifying grace of baptism, for example, justifies the new Christian, brings about the forgiveness of sins, and begins the Christian life as a participation in the very life of God. Grace is God’s gift of divine life and power. Sanctifying grace, which is necessary for salvation, can be lost through mortal sin. If lost, however, it can be restored through the sacrament of reconciliation. Sanctifying grace is strengthened and preserved through the sacrament of the Eucharist, and through all of the sacraments received after baptism.

FRUITFUL PARTICIPATION

The invisible grace that is infallibly offered *ex opere operato* through the sacraments does not necessarily benefit or bear fruit in each individual recipient. Some people are better disposed to benefit from the grace than others. The Christian who has strong faith, as well as a burning love for God and neighbor, benefits more from any given sacrament than an individual with little faith and love. Furthermore, if a Christian places an *obex* (obstacle of vice or sin) between himself and God, he or she does not benefit from a sacrament at all.

Each Christian’s salvation depends upon participation in the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The faithful—both ordained and non-ordained—must strive to participate as fully and fruitfully as possible in that sacrifice through the sacraments. As the Second Vatican Council emphasized: “Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and actual participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy” (SC 14). Actual participation in the sacraments is sometimes confused with active participation, which