

Sacrosanctum Concilium – The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

The very first line of Sacrosanctum Concilium quantifies the main goals of the Council: reinvigorate Catholics, modernize the Church in a meaningful way, promote unity of all Christian denominations, and reach out to the whole world. This document reveals that God's love created a perfect way for us to worship God by a divine means, all for our good. If we know what true liturgy is and participate fully in it, liturgy allows us to be drawn closely to God's love. Liturgy is a means of seeking and finding perfect truth and love. Participating in liturgy is a response to Christ's presence in his Church. Liturgy is the official worship of the Church. Liturgy consists of the Seven Sacraments and the Liturgy of the Hours.

The Mass is referred to as The Sacred Liturgy. The Mass allows us to participate in the Paschal Mystery of Christ's Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, for Christ is present in Liturgy. Christ's love flows to us in a special way from the Eucharist and The Word of God. Liturgy is a Celebration of the Church, and it signifies our unity in Christ! Although private prayers and devotions are meaningful, the Sacred Liturgy is The Source and Summit of life: the beginning and the end of who we are and who we can become.

The Eucharist Celebration is to foster more profound love of God as well as love for each other. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy makes it clear that God's Word was to become a more dynamic part of liturgy.

The Council Fathers proposed the restoration of the Catechumenate for Adults. A time was to be set aside for formation and instruction. The Rite of Confirmation was to be revised, making the strong connection with Baptism clearer. The Sacrament of Extreme Unction received a more modern name: Anointing of the Sick. It was made clear that this Sacrament was not only to be reserved for those near death. The purpose of the Sacraments is threefold: give worship to God, build up the Body of Christ, and sanctify humanity.

The Divine Office (Liturgy of the Hours), is a sacred prayer, meant to help us remember that every day, every hour, and every minute are holy. To promote this, certain times of the day are set aside for God to be officially praised throughout the day. The Office is an ancient tradition and prized possession, which unites the Church to God.

The Church regards the whole mystery of Christ as important and this is why it is formed as a Liturgical Year. It is a set calendar commemorating and recalling the mysteries of redemption. The three-year liturgical cycle is meant to celebrate the fuller story of Jesus, from birth and life, to death and resurrection, to ascension and the promise of his return.

The Council Fathers said that all music and art incorporated into the liturgy should be committed to directing minds to see God prayerfully. They should promote faithfulness and lift hearts to want to pray and be one with God. Church structures to be constructed are to be designed specifically with liturgy in mind. The design inside should be laid out in such a way that it helps promote active participation.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

Vatican II calls the Sacred Liturgy the "source and summit" of the Church's life (SC, 10). "The Eucharist is the principal manifestation of Christ's priesthood." The Passion "is not intended to be simply a memory but a living reality constantly present in the heart of the Church." It is Jesus' gift to the Father first and second to us. What do you think the liturgy and the sacrifice in the Eucharist do for the Church?

Being “active” participants does not mean “to do stuff.” We grow holy through Christ’s grace, not by our own choice. Do you find yourself consciously recognizing what is happening to you in the liturgy and not so much what you are doing in liturgy? Think of Mary’s fiat, her yes. Can you remember a time where you bravely said yes like Mary and allowed God to transform you?

“Sacred silence is a prerequisite of active participation.” How comfortable are you with silence introduced in Mass? Do you see this as a powerful tool in liturgy? If so, how? If not, why not?