

Deepening Our Appreciation For The Liturgy: The Revised Roman Missal

Part 2: Vatican Council II: Theological and Spiritual Foundations of Liturgical Renewal Despite strong opposition from some of his closest collaborators, John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council in 1962. The work of the Popes that preceded him is a strong indication that the Spirit was at work in the Church. We can assert that this Council was a new Pentecost. Pope John XXIII would not see the work of the Council finished. It fell upon his successor to guide the Council through great difficulties to a successful completion. This Council was about much more than just liturgy. It was about a new and deeper understanding of the Church. Among the most popular understandings of the Church to come out of Vatican II are these two: the Church as the **Body of Christ** and the Church as the **People of God** served by their pastors. As the Body of Christ, we are members of this body with Christ as our Head and we are to be molded into Christ's image until he is imprinted on us (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, # 7). The metaphor of the body implies the acceptance that the church is not a unity of uniformity and is therefore open to the diverse gifts of its members and also that every member is important and each has a unique part to play in order for the whole to function optimally. Vatican II clearly sought to remove the mistaken supposition that only priests and religious are called to a life of holiness and instead asserted that every member of the body of Christ is called to live a life of sanctity.

The Church as the People of God in spite of the great diversity of its members is a wonderful harmony through the union of all members in the person of Christ. The Council reiterated Pius XII's teaching on the relationship between the royal priesthood of all the baptized and the ministerial priesthood of the ordained who together offer the Eucharist. To quote the words of the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* # 10: "Although they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood or hierarchical (not political power but sacred service) priesthood are nonetheless interrelated, for each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ." The implication of this understanding is that contrary to Catholics thinking that the Church really belongs to the hierarchy and everyone else just coasts along (in the liturgy and in ministry priests did practically everything making the laity passive observers), they came to understand that the Church belongs to them and they have an irreplaceable role to play in making it truly what it is called to be by God. This is an image of Church in which all should play their baptismally given role proactively and in which no one should be a free-rider.

Even though it was out of the logical sequence of the 16 documents that came out of the Second Vatican Council, the first document to come out of the Council was the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)* not only because the liturgical experts were the readiest of all commissions for the renewal (they had been working on liturgy renewal for 70 years) but also due to the fact that liturgy is the most important work of the church. It was imperative to change the liturgy to fit the new understanding of the Church. The controlling purpose of the liturgical renewal was clearly stated, "In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, **the aim to be considered before all else is full and active participation by all the people, since it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit**" (# 14) The Council in the same paragraph repeats that "Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that **full, conscious, and active participation** in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy." They add the word **conscious** as a reminder to all that the laity exercises their priesthood only through full, active, conscious (attentive) participation. In the mass there should be only participants and no spectators since this kind of participation is the right and duty of the Christian people by virtue of their baptism. The liturgy embodies the nature of the Church as the Body of Christ with its different parts and functions (think of the diversity of ministries and ministers) and throughout the world the Church respects diversity in the way different races and people celebrate the liturgy (it is a myth to think that mass is celebrated exactly the same way everywhere).

In the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* # 106 we have a description of what happens when the people of God gather on the Lord's Day: "For on this day Christ's faithful must gather together so that by hearing the word of God and taking part in the Eucharist, they call to mind the passion, the resurrection, and the glorification of the Lord Jesus [what we call the Paschal Mystery]" and offer thanks to God who 'has begotten them again unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead'." For the next year, in bite size portions, we will learn about all the aspects of the liturgical renewal so that Mass may become a living and transformative experience. The Council realized that in order for the renewal to be understood and properly implemented, it was necessary to return to the vernacular in the liturgy. Next week, we will learn that liturgical reform has come down to us in stages specifically through the Roman Missal.

