

Sacrosanctum Concilium

The Apostolic Constitution on the
Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council
Issued December 4, 1963

Preliminary Questions

- What is the duty of the Christian faithful? Which of these duties is the most important?
- What is the Church's duty? Which of these duties is the most important?
- What is the purpose of the Liturgy? How would you describe the Liturgy to a non-Catholic?

Goals of Vatican II

1. “This sacred Council has several aims in view: it desires
 - to impart an ever increasing vigor to the Christian life of the faithful;
 - to adapt more suitably to the needs of our own times those institutions which are subject to change;
 - to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ;
 - to strengthen whatever can help to call the whole of mankind into the household of the Church.
 - The Council therefore sees particularly cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the *liturgy*.”

Purpose of the Liturgy

2. “For the liturgy, through which the work of our redemption is accomplished, most of all in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, is the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church.”

Human and Divine Interaction

2. “It is of the essence of the Church that she be both

- human and divine,
- visible and yet invisibly equipped,
- eager to act and yet intent on contemplation,
- present in this world and yet not at home in it;

and she is all these things in such wise that in her

- the human is directed and subordinated to the divine,
- the visible likewise to the invisible,
- action to contemplation,
- and this present world to that city yet to come, which we seek.”

Purpose of the Liturgy

2 (cont.). *The Liturgy*

- *builds the faithful into a dwelling place for God in the Spirit;*
- *strengthens the power of the faithful to preach Christ;*
- *shows forth the Church as a sign to the nations.*

Renewal of the Liturgy

3. *The Council gives practical liturgical norms.*

4. *The Council also desires that “the rites be revised carefully in the light of sound tradition, and that they be given new vigor to meet the circumstances and needs of modern times.”*

Revelation in Old Testament and in Christ

5. *God revealed himself in Old Testament times in various ways and in rituals.*

In the fullness of time, God sent his son to achieve reconciliation and to give us the fullness of divine worship.

This reconciliation came through the paschal mystery, through the passion and resurrection.

“For it was from the side of Christ as He slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth the wondrous sacrament of the whole Church.”

This work continues in the Church

6. Jesus sent the apostles to proclaim His death and resurrection.

The apostles are to accomplish the work of salvation “by means of sacrifice and sacraments, around which the entire liturgical life revolves.”

The Church continues to celebrate the paschal mystery, reading the scriptures, celebrating the Eucharist, giving thanks to God in Christ Jesus.

Presence of Christ in the Liturgy

7. Christ is present in His Church in several ways:

- in liturgical celebrations*
- in the Sacrifice of the Mass*
- in the person of His minister, who stands in the place of Christ offering the same offering*
- in the Eucharistic species*
- in the Sacraments*
- in His Word*
- when the Church prays and sings*

Presence of Christ in the Liturgy

7 (cont.). Christ always associates himself with the Church in worship.

“Rightly, then, the liturgy is considered as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. In the liturgy the whole public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and His members.

“From this it follows that every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the priest and of His Body which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others; no other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree.”

The Nature of the Liturgy

8. *The liturgy on earth is a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy. We await the coming of Our Savior, Jesus Christ.*

9. *The Church celebrates the sacred liturgy. However, before coming to the liturgy, people must be called to faith and conversion. By announcing the good news of salvation to those who do not believe, the Church prepares them for the sacraments.*

The Nature of the Liturgy

10. “The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows.”

The goal of apostolic works is to bring people to faith, and thus to share in the Lord's Supper.

The liturgy moves the faithful to holiness and to be filled with the love of Christ. We receive grace from the Eucharist, for the sanctification of mankind which is the goal of all other activities in the Church.

Drawing Fruit from the Liturgy

11. *For the liturgy to have its full effects, the faithful should be properly disposed. “Their minds should be attuned to their voices.”*

“Pastors of souls must therefore realize that, when the liturgy is celebrated, something more is required than the mere observation of the laws governing valid and licit celebration; it is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects.”

Drawing Fruit from the Liturgy

Beware of a false dichotomy:

- Observing liturgical laws for a valid and licit celebration

vs.

- Insuring the faithful take part in such a way that they are aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the ritual, and enriched by its effects.

These are not mutually exclusive:

Both—and, not Either—or.

General Principles for the Liturgy

12. The faithful are called to personal prayer that supplements their public liturgical prayer.

13. Popular devotions are commended. These devotions are subject to the authority of the Church. They should be in harmony with the liturgy and liturgical seasons, since they come from the liturgy and should lead people to the liturgy.

Full and Active Participation

14. “Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people, is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.”

Question: What is fully conscious and active participation?

Full and Active Participation

14 (cont.). “In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit; and therefore pastors of souls must zealously strive to achieve it, by means of the necessary instruction, in all their pastoral work.”

Question: Does the goal of full and active participation give license to ignore other liturgical norms?

Full and Active Participation

14 (cont.). “Yet it would be futile to entertain any hopes of realizing this unless the pastors themselves, in the first place, become thoroughly imbued with the spirit and power of the liturgy, and undertake to give instruction about it. A prime need, therefore, is that attention be directed, first of all, to the liturgical instruction of the clergy.”

Question: What is the spirit and power of the liturgy?

Training of the Clergy

17. “In seminaries and houses of religious, clerics shall be given a liturgical formation in their spiritual life. For this they will need proper direction, so that they may be able to understand the sacred rites and take part in them wholeheartedly; and they will also need personally to celebrate the sacred mysteries, as well as popular devotions which are imbued with the spirit of the liturgy. In addition they must learn how to observe the liturgical laws, so that life in seminaries and houses of religious may be thoroughly influenced by the spirit of the liturgy.”

Training of the Faithful

19. “With zeal and patience, pastors of souls must promote the liturgical instruction of the faithful, and also their active participation in the liturgy both internally and externally, taking into account their age and condition, their way of life, and standard of religious culture. By so doing, pastors will be fulfilling one of the chief duties of a faithful dispenser of the mysteries of God; and in this matter they must lead their flock not only in word but also by example.”

The Immutable vs. the Changeable

21. *The Church wants to restore the liturgy in order to make it more effective in communicating grace.*

The liturgy is made up of immutable elements that are divinely instituted.

The liturgy is also composed of elements subject to change. These things ought to be changed, with the passage of time, if they are no longer suited to the inner nature of the liturgy.

The texts and rites should be restored in order to clearly express the holy things they signify, but also to help the faithful understand them and take part in them fully and actively.

Norms for adaptation

22. “No other person, even if he be a priest, may add, remove, or change anything in the liturgy on his own authority.”

- 23. Traditions should be retained while remaining open to legitimate progress.
- The liturgy must be investigated in a way that is theological, historical, and pastoral.
- Experience is derived from indults conceded in various places.
- Innovations should not be introduced unless genuinely required by the Church.
- New forms should grow organically from existing forms.

Norms for adaptation

24. Sacred scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the 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 their force, and it is from the scriptures that actions and signs derive their meaning. Thus to achieve the restoration, progress, and adaptation of the sacred liturgy, it is essential to promote that warm and living love for scripture to which the venerable tradition of both eastern and western rites gives testimony.

Other Provisions of Sacrosanctum Concilium

- Because of the duty of every person to fully and actively participate, the Council emphasizes the communal nature of liturgical celebrations (SC 27).
- The people should take part in responses, songs, actions, and gestures. Even so, reverent silence must be observed at the proper times (SC 30).
- Liturgical rites should exhibit a noble simplicity. They should be short, clear, and unencumbered by useless repetitions (SC 34).

Other Provisions of Sacrosanctum Concilium

- More texts from Scripture are to be introduced. There is to be a greater emphasis on preaching from scriptural and liturgical texts (SC 35).
- Liturgical texts can be translated into the vernacular, but the use of Latin is also to be preserved in the Liturgy (SC 36). The faithful are encouraged to know how to sing the ordinary parts of the Mass in Latin (SC 54).
- Every diocese is to have a commission on the sacred liturgy under the direction of the Bishop for promoting the liturgical apostolate. There may also be commissions on sacred music and sacred art (SC 45).

Other Provisions of Sacrosanctum Concilium

- The options for concelebrating a Mass are to be expanded (SC 57). Formerly, priests were obligated to celebrate individual Masses, even privately.
- “Extreme unction” is to be called “Anointing of the Sick” and is not only for those at the point of death, but for those who begin to be in danger of death from sickness or old age (SC 73).
- The liturgy of the hours is recommended for the laity who are encouraged to recite the divine office (SC 100).

Other Provisions of Sacrosanctum Concilium

- The purpose of sacred music is to add delight to prayer, to foster unity of mind, to confer greater solemnity on the sacred rites.
- The Church approves of all forms of true art having the needed qualities, and admits them into divine worship (SC 112).
- Musical texts must conform to Catholic doctrine and should be drawn from Scripture or liturgical sources (SC 121).

Other Provisions of Sacrosanctum Concilium

- The Church gives pride of place to Gregorian chant in the Roman liturgy. However, other kinds of sacred music may be used provided that they are in accord with the spirit of the liturgical action (SC 116).
- The pipe organ is to be held in high esteem, as a traditional musical instrument to add splendor to ceremony and lift up the mind to God. However, other instruments may also be used provided they are suitable for sacred use, accord with the dignity of the temple, and truly contribute to the edification of the faithful (SC 120).

Other Provisions of Sacrosanctum Concilium

- Art used in churches should be sacred, striving for noble beauty rather than sumptuous display. Art that is repugnant to faith, morals, or piety, or which offends true religious sense should be removed from the house of God (SC 124).
- “The practice of placing sacred images in churches so that they may be venerated by the faithful is to be maintained. Nevertheless their number should be moderate and their relative positions should reflect right order” (SC 125).
- Sacred furnishings and works of value are not to be disposed of or dispersed, since they are ornaments of the house of God (SC 126).

For further study...

A more thorough reading of Sacrosanctum Concilium would provide the opportunity to enter more deeply into the details of this document.