

THE PASTOR'S CORNER

The Paschal Mystery in the Life of the Church

The whole liturgical life of the Church revolves around the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments instituted by Christ for the spiritual life of his Church. In the words of St. Leo the Great, "what was visible in our savior has passed over into his mysteries." The sacraments are thus a participation in the divine life of Christ that comes forth from the body of Christ, the Church, by the action of the Holy Spirit. Each sacrament is a particular liturgical celebration of the Church that manifests and communicates the mystery of God's love for man. The word 'Liturgy' comes from a Greek term that means 'public work or work done on behalf of the people.' As liturgical actions of the Church, the sacraments actually convey the grace they symbolize to assist the faithful to live the Christian life in the world. Every liturgical celebration is an action of Christ himself in union with his mystical body and therefore the sacraments require and enable the participation of the people of God in the work of God. The celebration of the sacraments is an action of the whole Church and is the holy work of the whole Body of Christ, not entertainment or a spectator sport or even a private devotion.

Each sacrament as a liturgy of the Church is meant to teach us, not only intellectually but more importantly spiritually, about the mysteries of Jesus Christ that each sacrament portrays and conveys. A mystery is not a puzzle to be solved or to entertain us; it is a spiritual reality that is greater than our understanding. The mysteries of the incarnation, suffering, death and resurrection of Christ become efficaciously present to us through the liturgical life of the Church, most powerfully in the celebration of the sacraments. As mysteries, the sacraments have both a visible and an invisible reality, a reality that can be observed and perceived by all the human senses but that can only be understood in the depths of our souls by the eyes of faith. This is not difficult to understand in as much as a kiss and an embrace between spouses conveys the invisible reality of love. We cannot see love, we cannot touch it, taste it, hear it or smell it but we can experience it through our senses and know that it is real and present to us. So it is with the sacraments, they are the visible manifestations of God's love. Because the sacraments are not only a gift to us but also an act of worship by us, Jesus entrusts his sacraments to the Church, for worship is never a private action but rather the communal action of God's family.

While the sacraments truly convey the divine life of grace to us, the fruitful reception of this grace presupposes faith. The individual's faith is preceded by and flows from the faith of the Church of which the individual becomes a member by Baptism. Through the grace that flows from Christ through the Church to the individual we are able to grow in holiness, sanctity and unity. Jesus gives us the sacraments to call us to worship, to build up the Church, to deepen our faith and to make us holy. The fruit of the sacraments makes us not only recipients of grace but faith-filled participants in the divine nature. Thus it is that the entire body of Christ moved by the Holy Spirit celebrates the earthly liturgy that is a participation in the never ending Divine Liturgy. Liturgy, and therefore worship, is not a private act but a communal celebration, it is the Body of Christ at prayer. This is why Holy Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to full, conscious and active participation in all of the liturgical celebrations of the Body of Christ. Such participation is demanded by the very nature of the worship that is liturgy and to which the whole Christian people have both a right and an obligation by virtue of their Baptism for the faithful are the living stones from which the Heavenly Jerusalem is built. The liturgical worship of the People of God is centered on the Lord's Day but incorporates the whole liturgical year as a means of celebrating the whole mystery of Christ and participating in his salvific work. Since it is a family celebration liturgy also includes the cycle of the saints, our brothers and sisters in heaven, and extends the Eucharistic celebration throughout the whole day by means of communal prayer, especially the Liturgy of the Hours, so that in every part of the world at every hour of every day God is given the honor, the glory and the worship that is his due.

