

## #2 ENTERING THE HEART OF THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

When I taught high school, my students passionately offered complaints and criticisms about the Sunday Mass they were “forced to attend.” “Mr. Johnston, it’s so boring.” “But Mr. Johnston, the music is not good.” “Mr. Johnston, our priest doesn’t engage us.” “Mr. Johnston, why don’t they try to make it fun?” These may be valid concerns, but I always challenged my students to think a little deeper. I wanted them to examine their life in Christ as expressed in this communal gathering we call liturgy. So over the course of a semester, we studied the liturgical life of the Church and in the end, the Spirit moved some of these young people to a deeper appreciation of the liturgy.

At times, I catch myself making similar statements and I have to step back and reconnect with the purpose of our communal liturgical gatherings – praise and adoration of God. Obviously, the presider, the assembly’s attitude, the music, gestures, rituals, and our own histories all affect how we experience the liturgy.

What is your experience or understanding of the liturgy? Is it private time for prayer or a communal gathering in the Spirit? Is it primarily a duty or do you hunger for this divine encounter? Is it a celebration of our life in God and God’s life in us or a monotonous routine to finish quickly? Does the way we pray truly express our profound love for God and God’s infinite and awesome love for us?

We all come to the liturgy with joy in our hearts as well as the reality of our brokenness. The beauty of this gathering is that we come as a people united in Christ, no matter our race, gender, or social status. United by the simple, but profound, water-bath and our sharing at the Eucharistic Table, we become one Body, the sacrament of Christ to the entire world. We are nourished at the liturgy and sent forth to proclaim to the good news of salvation.

The liturgy invites us to participate intensely in the Divine Life. Every time we gather for Sunday Eucharist, for weddings, funerals, anointings, reconciliation, and ordinations we enter deeply into the very heart of the paschal mystery. We are challenged to live differently. We are invited to love and called to serve. We give thanks for God’s mercy and rejoice in God’s love. This encounter with Love transforms us.

The liturgy is the basis of our common life in Christ, which we come to understand more deeply as we journey together to God’s Kingdom. In the next article, we will explore the how the fathers of the Second Vatican Council reflected on this in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*.

