

### #3 LITURGY: THE CHURCH'S PUBLIC WORK

The liturgical movement that helped pave the way for the Second Vatican Council, was well underway in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe and took root in the United States in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In many cases, the liturgy had previously been reduced to rubrics and laws, but the Holy Spirit was leading the Church to reflect on her gathering and challenged her to enter more deeply into the heart of the paschal mystery. Liturgical pioneers like Virgil Michel, OSB, and Msgr. Martin Hellriegel helped usher in a renewed understanding of and interest in the sacred liturgy.

After renewal and experimentation in the 1940s and 1950s the Holy Spirit inspired Pope John XXIII to convene the Second Vatican Council, which rooted its reforms in the liturgy since it is there that we most intimately encounter the Risen Lord. The first document issued by the Council was *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (SC). This document defines the Church's understanding of its liturgical celebration and then sets out the agenda for a renewal of the Church's liturgical rites.

The word liturgy, derived from the Greek word *leitourgia*, is defined as “public works” or “service in the name of/on behalf of the people” (CCC 1069). Historically, this could be anything from a great public festival to building a sewer system or roadways. It was anything produced for the benefit of the general public. Early Christians adopted this term to describe their “public works” or worship of the Father, through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church's worship of the Father is always a corporate act in union with Christ. It calls us to bear witness to Christ's redeeming love to the world in worship and through charitable deeds. The Church is the sacrament of Christ in the world.

*Sacrosanctum Concilium* emphasizes that every time we gather to celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours or the Eucharist, we participate in Christ's own prayer to the Father and the ongoing work of redemption “in, with, and through his Church” (SC §2 and CCC 1069). This worship of the Trinity is our work. We are each called to this work by our baptism into Christ's body — especially when we are gathered — for the Church is the herald of Christ's saving love.

From this brief discussion on the riches of the liturgy, I hope you are invited to reflect on the profundity of our liturgical gatherings and to continue studying the deep liturgical/theological tradition of our Church. The liturgy truly is the “source and summit” of our Christian life (SC §10). In the next article, we will focus specifically on the importance of Sunday, the day of resurrection.

