

Ten After Ten Session 56: Celebrating the Church's Sacraments

135 This chapter...will therefore treat of the celebration of the sacraments of the Church. It will consider that which, through the diversity of liturgical traditions, is common to the celebration of the seven sacraments. This fundamental catechesis on the sacramental celebrations responds to the first questions posed by the faithful regarding this subject:

—Who celebrates the liturgy?

—How is the liturgy celebrated?

—When is the liturgy celebrated?

—Where is the liturgy celebrated?

Who Celebrates?

1136 Liturgy is an “action” of the whole Christ (*Christus totus*). Those who even now celebrate it without signs are already in the heavenly liturgy, where celebration is wholly communion and feast.

1137 The book of Revelation, read in the Church's liturgy, first reveals to us, “A throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne”: the Lord God. It then shows the Lamb, “standing, as though it had been slain”: Christ crucified and risen, the one high priest of the true sanctuary, the same one “who offers and is offered, who gives and is given.” Finally it presents “the river of the water of life... flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb,” one of most beautiful symbols of the Holy Spirit.

1138 “Recapitulated in Christ,” these are the ones who take part in the service of the praise of God and the fulfillment of his plan: the heavenly powers, all creation (the four living beings), the servants of the Old and New Covenants (the twenty-four elders), the new People of God (the one hundred and forty-four thousand), especially the martyrs “slain for the word of God,” and the all-holy Mother of God (the Woman), the Bride of the Lamb, and finally “a great multitude which no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes, and peoples and tongues.”

1139 It is in this eternal liturgy that the Spirit and the Church enable us to participate whenever we celebrate the mystery of salvation in the sacraments.

1140 It is the whole community, the Body of Christ united with its Head, that celebrates. Liturgical services are not private functions but are celebrations of the Church which is ‘the sacrament of unity,’ namely, the holy people united and organized under the authority of the bishops. Therefore, liturgical services pertain to the whole Body of the Church. They manifest it, and have effects upon it. But they touch individual members of the Church in different ways, depending on their orders, their role in the liturgical services, and their actual participation in them.

1141 The celebrating assembly is the community of the baptized who, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, that through all the works of Christian men they may offer spiritual sacrifices. This “common priesthood” is that of Christ the sole priest, in which all his members participate.

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

1142 But the members do not all have the same function. Certain members are called by God, in and through the Church, to a special service of the community. These servants are chosen and consecrated by the sacrament of Holy Orders, by which the Holy Spirit enables them to act in the person of Christ the head, for the service of all the members of the Church. The ordained minister is, as it were, an “icon” of Christ the priest.

1143 For the purpose of assisting the work of the common priesthood of the faithful, other particular ministries also exist, not consecrated by the sacrament of Holy Orders; their functions are determined by the bishops, in accord with liturgical traditions and pastoral needs. Servers, readers, commentators, and members of the choir also exercise a genuine liturgical function.

1144 In the celebration of the sacraments it is thus the whole assembly that is *leitourgos*, each according to his function, but in the unity of the Spirit who acts in all. In liturgical celebrations each person, minister or layman, who has an office to perform, should carry out all and only those parts which pertain to his office by the nature of the rite and the norms of the liturgy.