

Ask Fr. James

We are called to Active Participation at Mass.

Catholic worship is more than a matter of ceremonies or rubrics. Its focus is on the supernatural reality contained in the liturgical rites that makes present Jesus Christ and his body, the Church. In November 1964 with the promulgation of the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Liturgy, this idea was further developed with a fuller explanation that in the liturgy the whole public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the head and his members and that all are called to "participate fully and actively." What this means is that a pastor is not the organizer of an entertainment, and the liturgy not a variety show and the choir is not an orchestra performance. It is the whole church singing and praise God in worship.

The Catholic liturgy is ultimately something given by Christ, not something we make up; it is an encounter with the mystery of God who is the origin of our life, the source of our salvation; it is not the community's celebration of itself. Our participation is, of course, necessary, but as a means of inserting ourselves humbly into the spirit of the liturgy and of serving him who is the true subject of the liturgy: Jesus Christ. Thus, in the celebration of the liturgy, we need deep reverence, a formality that respects the liturgical rites, a solemnity and dignity that reflect the mystery of Christ that is made present under the sacramental signs and a deep sense of the holiness of what is taking place.

Pope Benedict XVI once said; "in the liturgy the Lord enters into the Church and makes her his house and thereby makes us brothers and sisters. That is why a dignified celebration of the liturgy is so important. It respects the nature of the Church and her liturgy as the sacramental presence of God among us." Pope Benedict also said that at each celebration of the liturgy as the worship of the whole Church, worldwide, but also, in a certain sense, as the liturgy of heaven. Heaven is torn open here, and we are incorporated with the great chorus of praise.

The early Christian document, the Didache or the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, says, "On the Lord's Day come together, break bread and hold the Eucharist after confessing your transgression so that your offering may be pure." This is identical with what St. Paul's describes the authentic celebration of the Eucharist to the Corinthians: "When you assemble as a church, ... it is the Lord's supper you are eating... (1 Cor. 11).

Pope, Benedict XVI asked that we must thus neither add to nor take away anything from the order of the Mass. That form of liturgical celebration and prayer that we call the "rite" is a condensed expression of living tradition enabling the Church to express her faith as it has been lived through many generations. "The Church, both before and after the Council, was and is the same Church, one, holy, catholic, and apostolic . . . proclaiming the death of the Lord until he comes." It is the Church of the apostolic era, of the Middle Ages, the Church of the Council of Trent and of Vatican I; it is the Church of Vatican II and of the third millennium.