

Catechesis: Liturgical Catechesis

Introduction

From ancient times, liturgy has been the heartbeat of the Church. Through it the Christian people gather for worship, their life in Christ is renewed, and they are sent out in mission. Again and again, at Sunday Eucharist, in the sacraments, and in the Liturgy of the Hours, the Church is called to share in the mystery of Christ and to go forth to be leaven in the world. In the words of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, the liturgy is “the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows.” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10).

This segment is meant to help you reflect on the importance of liturgical catechesis. Just follow the outline. Begin by reflecting or journaling on the *first question*. Then read the article “What is Liturgical Catechesis” and jot down your responses to the *reflection questions*.

First Question

What do you think of when you hear the term “liturgical catechesis”?

What is Liturgical Catechesis?

Catechesis that leads people to a deep and fruitful experience of the liturgy is of the utmost importance. The General Directory for Catechesis asserts boldly that “Catechesis is intrinsically bound to every liturgical and sacramental action.” (30). It calls liturgical catechesis “an eminent kind of catechesis” (71). Indeed, because of the

liturgy's central role in the Church's life, the Catechism of the Catholic Church calls liturgy "the privileged place for catechizing the people of God" (1074).

The liturgical cycle, the sacramental symbols and the ritual prayers and gestures of the liturgy are the first and primary source of liturgical catechesis. Every year the entire mystery of Christ, from his birth through his death, Resurrection, Ascension, and sending of the Spirit, is proclaimed and is celebrated. The task of liturgical catechesis is to prepare people to encounter those mysteries, celebrate them, and effectively reflect on them in order to live a transformed life in Christ.

Liturgical catechesis is a way of forming people in the Christian life. It is made up of three moments:

- *Preparation for the liturgy:* In order to participate fruitfully in the liturgy, we must understand or in the case of children, recognize the liturgical signs and symbols and the experiences of God's people that gave rise to them. It is also important to come to the liturgy with the proper dispositions of heart. Liturgical catechesis therefore includes not only instruction *about* the liturgy, but also everything that helps a person or a community to experience conversion, openness to God's will, and the desire to be united with Christ and his Church.
- *Participation in the liturgy:* The liturgical celebration itself contains much teaching. The Scripture readings, the homily, the prayers, and the sacred texts spoken in the liturgy are rich expressions of Catholic faith. The signs and symbols also teach, without words. By full, active, and conscious participation in the liturgy, the faithful learn on a deep level what it means to be children of God and brothers and sisters to one another in Christ. They are formed in the prayer of the Church, and in the ways of God.

- *Reflection on the liturgy:* The lessons that liturgy teaches however can be lost if there is no reflection on them later. The third moment of liturgical catechesis therefore takes place after the celebration. Using the actual experience of worship as the starting point, liturgical catechesis moves “from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, from the ‘sacraments’ to the ‘mysteries’” (CCC 1075). Because liturgical catechesis draws people into the mystery of Christ, it is sometimes called “mystagogy.”

An Example

Thus, preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation would include not only catechesis on the signs of the celebration, laying on of hands, and anointing—but also invite interior conversion and cultivate a desire for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The celebration itself might open up the meaning of the Scripture which is proclaimed, or some aspect of the Holy Spirit’s action in human life. Reflection could call attention to the Bishop’s gesture of extending or laying on of hands and anointing the candidates with chrism, or the prayers of General Intercession.

Liturgical catechesis serves an important function in the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. Indeed all the sacraments are key moments in life when faith can deepen, and awareness of God’s saving work can crystallize. Liturgical catechesis helps individuals and communities enter into these sacramental events wholeheartedly, and receive from them an abundance of God’s grace.

Likewise, the regular celebration of the Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Hours, and Penance also provide many occasions for liturgical

catechesis. By preparing young people to celebrate, planning so there is active participation by young people in the liturgies themselves, and doing reflection with them afterwards, the beneficial effects of these celebrations are harvested and integrated into the whole of Christian life.

Reflection Questions

- Describe a time when a liturgical experience uncovered something for you about God, the Church or your own spiritual life?
- What are some ways you could be more intentional about doing liturgical catechesis with students in your school setting?