

OUR LADY OF LOURDES RCIA
LITURGY OF THE EARLY CHURCH AND THE MASS TODAY

“Remember the Sabbath day ---- keep it holy. Six days you may labor and do all your work, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God.”

Ex. 20:8-10

“Keep the sabbath, for that is to be the sign between you and Me throughout the generations, to show it is I, the Lord, who made you holy.”

Ex. 31:13

The Church celebrates the liturgy above all the Pascal mystery by which Christ accomplished the work of our salvation.

CCC. 1067

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1. In the book of Exodus of the Old Testament, we read of God giving to Moses at Mount Sinai the Commandments, entitling them as the Law and His Covenant with His Chosen People.¹ Among the precepts, God sets aside a specific day of special observance, declaring, *“Remember the Sabbath day --- keep it holy. Six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God.”*² The Sabbath; a word derived from the Hebrew verb “Shabath” meaning “to rest.”
2. The Sabbath is connected to creation and covenant. God’s rest on the seventh day was His contemplative gaze upon His work of creation and enjoying its goodness, especially the crown of His creation, man and woman. It was not a matter of divine inactivity but rather the deeper work of contemplation and the restful act of loving us.³ Sabbath for us is equally intended as time for contemplation and to worship God, nourishing a love relationship with Him and with our neighbor.
3. Each and every one of us, having been created by God, owes Him worship and thanksgiving for what the lord has done and continue to do. The scriptural history of the Sabbath in the Old Testament demonstrates that it was a day of worship to God, and relaxation with one’s family. *“Then you shall delight in the Lord and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth.”*⁴
4. The word “liturgy” originally meant a “public work” or a “service in the name of/on behalf of the people.” Used in the religious sense, it means “the participation of the people of God in rendering acknowledgement and worship to God.”⁵
Liturgy is not a matter of private prayer, but a public act of worship by the faithful who are gathered together. At the liturgy of the people of ancient Israel, they remembered the great works that God had performed on their behalf and sang praises to Him for His love and mercy.
5. At the time of Jesus, the Jewish worship on the Sabbath consisted of recitation of appropriate prayers, readings from their scriptures, reflection on the lessons by a rabbi, recitation or chanting of the psalms.
The fullness of Jewish worship was the offering of sacrifice at the Temple in Jerusalem, reserved for the priests of the Temple, on certain days of holiness as cited in scripture⁶ or times of commemoration as accustomed to the Jewish religious practices.
6. The earliest Christian communities were composed mainly of converts from Judaism to the new covenant and were accustomed to worshipping in the synagogues and celebrating the Eucharist in their homes; “Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate

¹ Ex. 20:1-17

² Ex. 20:8-10

³ CCC 2184, 2185

⁴ Is. 58:14

⁵ CCC 1069

⁶ Lv. 23:1-44

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their meals with exaltation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people.”⁷

7. Hence, the celebration of the commemoration of the Last Supper, the Holy Eucharist, was separate from the worship in the synagogue. The Eucharist of the first Christians continued to be celebrated within a meal, the “Agape” or “Love Feast” in memory of the Last Supper.

The Agape continued for a time but by the time of St. Paul, about a decade or so after the Last Supper, abuses started to take place.⁸ Eventually the meal portion of the celebration was completely abolished.

8. The Christian liturgy sprang, then, from the Jewish liturgy. Soon the early converts were no longer welcome in the Jewish synagogues. Quite naturally they began to form assemblies with a sort of Christianized synagogues and followed the rituals of the synagogue, that of the readings, chanting of psalms, offering of prayers and exegesis to which they attached the Eucharistic celebration, the very center of worship. It was not until the beginning of 2nd century that the Eucharistic celebration was transferred to the morning hours.
9. A fundamental outline of the last Supper comprised the liturgy; bread and wine were brought to the presiding prelate or priest and placed on the table, in a natural attitude of prayer the presider would offer prayers, give thanks, take the offerings, recite the words of institution, break the bread, distribute it to the people, and in like manner offer the cup for them to partake. From the earliest period there were no exact Eucharistic prayers; improvised or extemporaneous prayers were normal style of worship, a practice that continued until at least the 4th century.
10. There are many indications of the liturgical forms of the early Apostolic Church, most especially in the writings of St. Paul:
 - Readings from Scripture - - - 1 Tim. 4:13 - - - “*To attend to the readings, exhortation and teaching.*”
 - Givers of sermons - - - Acts 20:7 - - - “*When we gathered together to break bread, Paul spoke to them.*”
 - Psalms and hymns - - - Col. 3:16 - - - “*Singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts.*”
 - Prayers for all the people - - - 1 Tim. 2:1-3 - - - “*I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions and thanksgiving be offered for everyone.*”
 - Pray with hands raised - - - 1 Tim. 2:8 - - - “*It is my wish, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands, without anger or argument.*”
 - Kiss of peace - - - 1 Cor. 16:20 - - - “*Greet one another with a holy kiss.*”
 - People to say ‘Amen’ - - - 1 Cor. 14:16 - - - “*To say Amen to your thanksgiving.*”

⁷ Acts 2:46

⁸ 1 Cor. 11:20-33

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11. The Eucharistic prayers from the 4th and 5th centuries show that the improvisation was no longer common. These new prayers were more developed in their theology and acquired certain characteristics order. The liturgy of the Church underwent a long series of development until the advent of the Council of Trent in 1545 when the liturgical celebration was suffering from lack of proper decorum, devotion and reverence. The Council reformed the liturgy of the Eucharistic rite with strict observance of all the rubrics⁹ in its proper performance, setting down the order of lessons and gospel readings, and of prayers.

Thus, the liturgy of the Mass unfolds in two major parts that form a single act of worship; first - prayers of homage, readings from scripture and homily, and second - the offering of a Sacrifice and partaking of the Eucharist.

12. The observance of the Sabbath was changed from the 7th day of the week, Saturday, to the 1st day, Sunday from the time of the Apostles. It was changed for the sake of having a day dedicated exclusively to Christian service. Sunday extends the celebration of Easter throughout the year. It is meant to be illuminated by the glory of the Risen Christ. It makes present the New Creation brought about by Christ in His Resurrection.

13. On April 3, 1969, Pope Paul VI approved the new Roman Missal which had been called for by the Second Vatican Council. The essential elements of the Mass today may be summarized into two parts; the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The former, the Liturgy of the Word, consists in the Introductory and Penitential rites, the Gloria and opening prayer, readings from Scripture, especially the Gospel, the Homily, Profession of Faith and recitation of the Creed. The readings are to awaken a response of faith in the listener.

The latter, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, consists of the Offering of the bread and wine, the Eucharistic prayer of Thanksgiving, Acclamation of the Holiness of God, Invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the gifts, the words of Consecration, the Communion rite, and Closing prayer and Dismissal. Each Mass ends with the mission to go forth and serve the Lord with love of God and neighbor.

14. The Fathers of the Vatican Council cited in the document “Constitution of Sacred Liturgy”¹⁰ on how the Eucharist should be celebrated: “The Church therefore, earnestly desires that Christ’s faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators. On the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers, they should take part in the sacred action, conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration.”

KEY PHRASES

- ❖ In liturgy, we praise and adore the Father as the source of all the blessings of creation, salvation and divine adoption.
- ❖ Word “liturgy” is from the Greek, meaning a public act of worship by the faithful

⁹ Rules for conduct of a liturgical service.

¹⁰ SC. No. 48

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gathered together by the power of the Spirit.

- ❖ The Eucharistic Liturgy contains the entire treasure of the Church since it makes present the Pascal Mystery, the very center event of Salvation.
- ❖ By the action of the liturgy, the Eucharist is the memorial of Christ's saving life, death and resurrection, made present for our salvation.