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QUESTION LITURGY

(from Greek *leiturgia* = public work, service, achievement by and for the people): In the Christian Tradition, liturgy means that the People of God participate in the “work of God”. The centerpiece of liturgical celebrations is the Holy Eucharist; the other liturgies—for example, the celebration of other sacraments, devotions, blessings, processions, and the Liturgy of the Hours—are ordered to it.

” The liturgy is never a mere meeting of a group of people, who make up their own form of celebration. ... [T]hrough our sharing in Jesus’ appearing before the Father, we stand both as members of the worldwide community of the whole Church and also of the communion of saints. Yes, in a certain sense this is the liturgy of heaven.

JOSEPH CARDINAL RATZINGER / POPE BENEDICT XVI, in *God and the World*

Celebrating the Christian mysteries (→ SACRAMENTS) is about encountering Jesus Christ in time. Until the end of time he is present in his → CHURCH. The most profound encounter with him on earth is the → LITURGY (divine worship). Therefore the *Rule of St. Benedict* says:

“Nothing may have priority over the liturgy.”

ST. BENEDICT OF NURSIA (ca. 480–547, founder of Western monasticism).



SECTION ONE God Acts in Our Regard by Means of Sacred Signs

166 *Why does the Church celebrate the liturgy so often?*

The people of Israel interrupted their work “seven times a day” (Ps 119:164) in order to praise God. Jesus participated in the liturgy and prayer of his people; he taught his disciples to pray and gathered them in the Upper Room so as to celebrate with them the → LITURGY of all liturgies: the gift of himself in the Last Supper. The → CHURCH, which calls us to the liturgy, obeys his command, “Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:24b). [1066–1070]

Just as a man breathes air in order to stay alive, so too the → CHURCH lives and breathes by celebrating the liturgy. God himself is the one who breathes new life into her day by day and enriches her with gifts through his Word and his → SACRAMENTS. We can use another image, too: every → LITURGY is like a rendezvous of love that God writes on our calendar. Anyone who has already experienced God’s love is glad to go to church. Someone who from time to time feels nothing and goes nevertheless shows God his faithfulness.

167 *What is liturgy?*

→ LITURGY is the official divine worship of the → CHURCH. [1077–1112]

A → LITURGY is not an event that depends on good ideas and great songs. No one makes or invents a liturgy. It is something living that grew over millennia of faith. A Mass is a holy, venerable action. Liturgy becomes exciting when one senses that God himself is present under its sacred signs and its precious, often ancient prayers.

168 *Why does the liturgy have priority in the life of the Church and of the individual?*

"The → LITURGY is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the font from which all her power flows" (Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum concilium* 10). [1074]

During Jesus' lifetime, multitudes of people flocked to him, because they were seeking his healing presence. Even today we can find him, for he lives in his Church. He assures us of his presence in two places: in service to the poor (Mt 25:40) and in the → EUCHARIST. There we run directly into his arms. And when we let him get close to us, he teaches us, feeds us, transforms us, heals us, and becomes one with us in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

169 *What happens to us when we celebrate the liturgy?*

When we celebrate the liturgy, we are drawn into the love of God, healed, and transformed. [1076]

The sole purpose of all liturgies of the → CHURCH and all her → SACRAMENTS is that we might have life and have it abundantly. When we celebrate the liturgy, we encounter the One who said about himself, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). Someone who is forsaken and goes to Mass receives protection and consolation from God. Someone who feels lost and goes to Mass finds a God who is waiting for him.



Power came forth from him and healed them all.

Lk 6:19b



Without the Sunday Eucharist, we cannot live. Do you not know that the Christian exists for the Eucharist and the Eucharist for Christians?

Answer of the martyr SATURNINUS (305) during cross-examination to the accusation that he had taken part in the forbidden assembly on Sunday.



"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

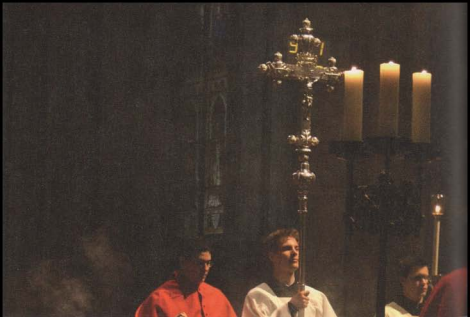
Jn 10:10b



While he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.


Lk 15:20





? BLESSING

A blessing is something good that comes from God (Latin *benedicere*; Greek *eu-logein* = to call good); to bless is a divine, life-giving, and life-preserving action. God, the Father and Creator of all being, says: It is good that you exist. The fact that you are is something beautiful.

 Then I will go to the altar of God, the God my exceeding joy; and I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God.

Ps 43:4

◇ CHAPTER ONE ◇

God and the Sacred Liturgy

170 What is the most profound origin of the liturgy?

The most profound origin of the → LITURGY is God, in whom there is an eternal, heavenly banquet of love—the joy of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Because God is love, he would like to let us participate in the feast of his joy and to grant us his → BLESSINGS. [1077–1109]

Our earthly liturgies must be celebrations full of beauty and power: Feasts of the Father who created us—that is why the gifts of the earth play such a great part: the bread, the wine, oil and light, incense, sacred music, and splendid colors. Feasts of the Son who redeemed us—that is why we rejoice in our liberation, breathe deeply in listening to the Word, and are strengthened in eating the Eucharistic Gifts. Feasts of the Holy Spirit who lives in us—that is why there is a wealth of consolation, knowledge, courage, strength, and blessing that flows from these sacred assemblies.

171 *What is the essence of every liturgy?*

→ **LITURGY** is always in the first place communion or fellowship with Jesus Christ. Every liturgy, not just the celebration of the Eucharist, is an Easter in miniature. Jesus reveals his passage from death to life and celebrates it with us. [1085]

The most important → **LITURGY** in the world was the Paschal liturgy that Jesus celebrated with his disciples in the Upper Room on the night before his death. The disciples thought that Jesus would be commemorating the liberation of Israel from Egypt. Instead, Jesus celebrated the liberation of all mankind from the power of death. Back in Egypt it was the "blood of the lamb" that preserved the Israelites from the angel of death. Now he himself would be the Lamb whose blood saves mankind from death. For Jesus' death and Resurrection is the proof that someone can die and nevertheless gain life. This is the genuine substance of every Christian liturgy. Jesus himself compared his death and Resurrection with Israel's liberation from slavery in Egypt. Therefore, the redemptive effect of Jesus' death and Resurrection is called the *Paschal mystery*. There is an analogy between the life-saving blood of the lamb at the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt (Ex 12) and Jesus, the true Paschal Lamb that has redeemed mankind from the bondage of death and sin.

172 *How many sacraments are there, and what are their names?*

The → **CHURCH** has seven → **SACRAMENTS**: Baptism, → **CONFIRMATION**, → **EUCCHARIST**, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. [1210]

173 *Why do we need sacraments in the first place?*

We need → **SACRAMENTS** in order to outgrow our petty human life and to become like Jesus through Jesus: children of God in freedom and glory. [1129]

In Baptism the fallen children of men become cherished children of God; through → **CONFIRMATION** the weak become strong, committed Christians; through Penance



"The blood [of the lamb] shall be a sign for you, upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt."

Ex 12:12-13f



SACRAMENT

(Latin *sacramentum* = military oath of allegiance; the usual translation for the Greek *mysterion* = mystery): Sacraments are holy, visible signs instituted by Christ of an invisible reality, in which Christians can experience the healing, forgiving, nourishing, strengthening presence of God that enables them to love in turn; this is possible because God's grace works in the sacraments.





Because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Rom 8:21



His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness ... by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature.

2 Pet 1:3



For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body [of Christ] eats and drinks judgment upon himself.

1 Cor 11:29



As each one has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.

1 Pet 4:10

the guilty are reconciled; through the → EUCCHARIST the hungry become bread for others; through Matrimony and Holy Orders individualists become servants of love; through the Anointing of the Sick the despairing become people of confidence. The sacrament in all the sacraments is Christ himself. In him we men, lost in selfishness, grow and mature into the true life that has no end.

174 *Why is faith in Jesus Christ not enough? Why does God give us the sacraments, too?*

We can and should come to God with all our senses, not just with the intellect. That is why God gives himself to us in earthly signs—especially in bread and wine, the Body and Blood of Christ. [1084, 1146–1152]

People saw Jesus, heard him, could touch him and thereby experience salvation and healing in body and soul. The sensible signs of the → SACRAMENTS show this same signature of God, who desires to address the whole man—not just his head.

175 *Why do the sacraments belong to the Church? Why cannot anyone use them however he wants?*

→ SACRAMENTS are Christ's gift to his Church. It is her duty to administer them and to protect them from misuse. [1117–1119, 1131]

Jesus entrusted his words and signs to specific men, namely, the apostles, who were to hand them on; he did not hand them over to an anonymous crowd. Today we would say: He did not post his inheritance on the Internet for free access but rather registered it under a domain name. Sacraments exist *for* the Church and *through* the Church. They are *for* her, because the Body of Christ, which is the Church, is established, nourished, and perfected through the sacraments. They exist *through* her, because the sacraments are the power of Christ's Body, for example in confession, where Christ forgives our sins through the → PRIEST.

176 Which sacraments can be received only once in a lifetime?

Baptism, → CONFIRMATION, and Holy Orders. These → SACRAMENTS imprint an indelible mark on the soul of the Christian. Baptism and Confirmation make him once and for all a child of God and Christlike. Holy Orders similarly leaves an imprint on a Christian man. [1121]

Just as someone always is and remains a child of his parents (and not just “sometimes” or “a little bit”), so also through Baptism and Confirmation one becomes forever a child of God, Christlike, and a member of his Church. Similarly, Holy Orders is not a “job” that a man does until retirement; rather, it is an irrevocable charism (gift of grace). Because God is faithful, the effect of these sacraments is maintained forever for the Christian—as receptivity to God’s call, as a vocation, and as protection. Consequently these sacraments cannot be repeated.

177 Why is faith a prerequisite for the sacraments?

→ SACRAMENTS are not magic. A Sacrament is effective of itself, however, to be fruitful it must be accepted in faith. Sacraments not only presuppose faith, they also strengthen it and give expression to it. [1122–1126]

Jesus commissioned the → APOSTLES first to make people disciples through their preaching, in other words, to awaken their faith and only *then* to baptize them. There are two things, therefore, that we receive from the → CHURCH: faith and the sacraments. Even today someone becomes a Christian, not through a mere ritual or by being listed in a register, but rather through acceptance of the true faith. We receive the true faith from the Church. She vouches for it. Because the Church’s faith is expressed in the → LITURGY, no sacramental ritual can be changed or manipulated at the discretion of an individual minister or a congregation.



When the goodness and loving kindness of our Saviour appeared, he saved us ... by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit.

Tit 3:4–5



This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

1 Cor 4:1



What was visible in our Savior has passed over into his mysteries.

ST. LEO THE GREAT
(ca. 400–461, Pope and father of the Church)



For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received.

1 Cor 15:3



As one candle is lit from the flame of another, so is faith kindled by faith.

ROMANO GUARDINI
(1885–1968)





” And so, with the Angels and all the Saints we proclaim your glory, as with one voice we sing: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts. ...

Eucharistic Prayer II of the Church

” It (the liturgy) is entering into the liturgy of the heavens that has always been taking place. ... It is not the case that you think something up and then sing it; instead, the song comes to you from the angels.

JOSEPH RATZINGER / POPE BENEDICT XVI, “In the Presence of the Angels I Will Sing Your Praise” in *A New Song for the Lord*

178 *If a sacrament is administered by someone who is unworthy, does it fail to have its effect?*

No. The → SACRAMENTS are effective on the basis of the sacramental action that is carried out (*ex opere operato*), in other words, independently of the moral conduct or spiritual outlook of the minister. It is enough for him to intend to do what the → CHURCH does. [1127–1128, 1131]

By all means, ministers of the sacraments ought to live an exemplary life. But the sacraments take effect, not because of the → HOLINESS of their ministers, but rather because Christ himself is at work in them. In any case, he respects our freedom when we receive the sacraments. That is why they have a positive effect only if we rely on Christ.

◇ CHAPTER TWO ◇

How We Celebrate the Mysteries of Christ

179 *Who celebrates the liturgy?*

In all earthly liturgies, Christ the Lord himself is the one who celebrates the cosmic → LITURGY, which encompasses angels and men, the living and the dead, the past, present, and future, heaven and earth. → PRIESTS and believers participate in different ways in Christ’s divine worship. [1136–1139]

When we celebrate the → LITURGY, we must prepare ourselves interiorly for the great thing that takes place in it: here and now Christ is present and, with him, all of heaven. There everyone is filled with unspeakable joy and at the same time with loving care for us. The last book of Sacred Scripture, Revelation, portrays in mysterious images this liturgy to which we here on earth join our voices. → 170

180 *Why is the Mass sometimes referred to as a “worship service”?*

A worship service is in the first place a service that God performs for us—and only then is it our service

offered to God. God gives himself to us under the form of holy signs—so that we might do the same: give ourselves unreservedly to him. [1145–1192]

Jesus is there in Word and → SACRAMENT—God is present. That is the first and most important thing about every liturgy. Only then do we enter the picture. Jesus sacrifices his life for us so that we might offer to him the spiritual sacrifice of our life. In the → EUCHARIST, Christ gives himself to us, so that we might give ourselves to him. Thus we take part in the redeeming and transforming sacrifice of Christ. Our little life is burst open and led into the kingdom of God. God can live his life in our lives.

181 *Why are there so many signs and symbols in the liturgies?*

God knows that we men are not only spiritual but also bodily creatures; we need signs and symbols in order to perceive and describe spiritual or interior realities. [1145–1152]

Whether it is red roses, a wedding ring, black clothing, graffiti, or AIDS armbands—we always express our interior realities through signs and are understood immediately. The incarnate Son of God gives us human signs in which he is living and active among us: bread and wine, the water of Baptism, the anointing with the Holy Spirit. Our response to God's sacred signs instituted by Christ consists in signs of reverence: genuflecting, standing while listening to the Gospel, bowing, folding our hands. And as though for a wedding we decorate the place of God's presence with the most beautiful things we have: flowers, candles, and music. In any case, signs also require words to interpret them.

182 *Why do the sacred signs of the liturgy need words, too?*

Celebrating the → LITURGY means encountering God; allowing him to act, listening to him, responding to him. Such dialogues are always expressed in gestures and words. [1153–1155, 1190]

” Symbols are the language of something invisible spoken in the visible world.

GERTRUD VON LE FORT
(1876–1971)

” I consider the language of symbols to be the only foreign language that every one of us ought to learn.

ERICH FROMM
(1900–1980, psychoanalyst)



And whoever would be the first among you must be the slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Mk 10:44–45



And one [of the angels] called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

Is 6:3



” Someone who sings prays twice.

ST. AUGUSTINE (354–430)



Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart.

Eph 5:19

Jesus spoke to men through signs and words. So it is in the → CHURCH, also, when the priests offers the gifts and says, “This is my Body ... this is my Blood” Only these interpreting words of Jesus cause the signs to become sacraments: signs that bring about what they signify.

183 *Why is there music at liturgies, and what kind of music must it be to be suitable for liturgy?*

Where words are not enough to praise God, music comes to our aid. [1156–1158, 1191]



When we turn to God, there is always something ineffable and unsaid left over. Then music can help out. In rejoicing, language becomes song—that is why the angels *sing*. Music in a worship service should make prayer more beautiful and more fervent, move more deeply the hearts of all in attendance and bring them closer to God, and prepare for God a feast of melody.

184 *How does the liturgy affect time?*

In the liturgy time becomes *time for God*.

Often we do not know what to do with our time—we look for a *pastime*. In the liturgy, time becomes quite dense, because every second is filled with meaning. When we celebrate the liturgy, we experience the fact that God has sanctified time and made every second a gateway into eternity.

185 *Why does the liturgy repeat itself every year?*

Just as we celebrate a birthday or a wedding anniversary each year, so too the → LITURGY celebrates over the course of the year the most important events in Christian salvation history. With one important difference, however: All time is God's time. "Memories" of Jesus' life and teaching are simultaneously encounters with the living God. [1163–1165, 1194–1195]

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard once said, "Either we are contemporaries of Jesus, or we can have nothing at all to do with it." Following the Church year in faith makes us indeed contemporaries of Jesus. Not because we can imagine ourselves so precisely as part of *his* time and *his* life, but rather because he comes into *my* time and *my* life, if I make room for him in this way, with his healing and forgiving presence, with the explosive force of his Resurrection.

186 *What is the liturgical year (the Church year)?*

The liturgical year, or the Church year, superimposes the mysteries of the life of Christ—from his Incarnation to his second coming in glory—on the normal course of the year. The liturgical year begins with Advent, the time of waiting for the Lord, and has its first high point in the Christmas season and its second, even greater climax in the celebration of the redemptive suffering, death, and Resurrection of Christ at Easter. The Easter season ends with the feast of Pentecost, the descent of the Holy Spirit on the → CHURCH. The liturgical year is repeatedly interrupted by feasts of the Lord, Mary, and the saints, in which the Church praises God's grace, which has led mankind to salvation. [1168–1173, 1194–1195]



[Make] the most of the time.

Eph 5:16

” God's eternity is not mere time-lessness, the negation of time, but a power over time that is really present with time and in time.

JOSEPH RATZINGER /
POPE BENEDICT XVI,
in *The Spirit of the Liturgy*

” The Church year, which makes present and portrays anew the life of Christ, is mankind's greatest work of art; and God has acknowledged it and allows it year after year, always granting it new light, as though one were encountering it for the first time.

JOCHEN KLEPPER
(1903–1942, German writer)



An Overview of the Church year

The Annunciation



Ash Wednesday

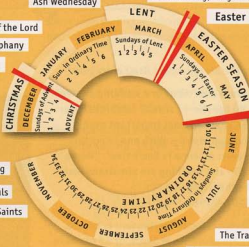
Palm Sunday, Holy Week

Baptism of the Lord

Epiphany

Christmas

Immaculate Conception of Mary



Easter

The Ascension

Pentecost

Trinity Sunday

Corpus Christi

Sacred Heart of Jesus

The Transfiguration

Assumption of Mary

Exultation of the Holy Cross

The Church's New Year begins on the first Sunday of Advent and reaches its highpoint at Easter.

187 How important is Sunday?

Sunday is the center of Christian time, for on Sunday we celebrate Christ's Resurrection, and every Sunday is a miniature Easter. [1163-1167, 1193]

If Sunday is disregarded or abolished, only work-days are left in the week. Man, who was created for joy, degenerates into a workhorse and a mindless consumer. We must learn on earth how to celebrate properly, or else we will not know what to do in heaven. Heaven is an endless Sunday.

→ 104-107

188 What is the Liturgy of the Hours?

The Liturgy of the Hours is the universal, public prayer of the → CHURCH. Biblical readings lead the person who prays it ever deeper into the mystery of the life of Jesus Christ.



Throughout the world this gives the Triune God the opportunity at every hour of the day to transform gradually those who pray and also the world. The Liturgy of the Hours is prayed not only by → **PRIESTS** and religious. Many Christians who take their faith seriously join their voices with the many thousands of praises and petitions that ascend to God from all over the world. [1174–1178, 1196]

The seven “hours of prayer” are like a treasury of the → **CHURCH’S** prayers. It also loosens our tongues when we have become speechless because of joy, sorrow, or fear. Again and again one is astonished in reciting the Liturgy of the Hours: an entire reading “coincidentally” applies precisely to my situation. God hears us when we call to him. He answers us in these texts—often in a way that is so specific as to be almost disconcerting. In any case he also allows us to have long periods of silence and dryness so that we can demonstrate our fidelity.

→ 473, 492

189 *How does the liturgy affect the spaces in which we live?*

By his victory, Christ has penetrated all places in the world. He himself is the true Temple, and the worship of God “in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:24) is no longer bound up with a particular place. Nevertheless, the Christian world is filled with churches and sacred signs, because men need specific places in which to meet and signs to remind them of this new reality. Every house of God is a symbol for our heavenly Father’s house, to which we are journeying. [1179–1181, 1197–1198]

Certainly one can pray anywhere—in the forest, on the beach, in bed. But since we men are not merely spiritual but also have a body, we need to see, hear, and feel one another; we need a specific place if we want to meet so as to be the Body of Christ; we must kneel down if we want to worship God; we must eat the transformed bread when it is offered; we must set our bodies in motion when *he* calls us. And a cross on the roadside will remind us of who owns the world and where our journey is taking us.

The seven times for prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours are:

- Matins (Office of Readings or Vigils, in the early morning hours)
- Lauds (Morning Prayer)
- Terce (9:00 a.m., Midmorning Prayer)
- Sext (12:00 noon, Midday Prayer)
- None (3:00 p.m., Midafternoon Prayer)
- Vespers (Evening Prayer)
- Compline (Night Prayer)





” God has set up churches like harbors along the coast, so that you may take refuge there out of the swirl of earthly cares and find peace and quiet.

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM
(349/350–407)

” The doctrine of the invisible church leads quite logically to the doctrine of invisible religion, and the next step is necessarily the disappearance of religion.

PAUL DE LAGARDE
(1827–1891, German Orientalist and philosopher)

190 *What is a Christian house of prayer?*

A Christian house of prayer is both a sign of the ecclesial communion of people at a specific place and also a symbol of the heavenly dwellings that God has prepared for us all. In God's house we gather together to pray in common or alone and to celebrate the → SACRAMENTS, especially the → EUCHARIST.
[1179–1186, 1197–1199]

“It smells like heaven here.” “Here you can be very quiet and reverent.” Many churches surround us perceptibly in a thick atmosphere of prayer. We sense that God is present here. The beauty of church buildings directs our attention to the beauty, greatness, and love of God. Churches are not just stone messengers of the faith, but dwelling places of God, who is really and truly and substantially present in the sacrament of the altar.

191 *What liturgical spaces define a house of God?*

The central places of a house of God are the altar with the crucifix, the → TABERNACLE, the celebrant's chair, the ambo, the baptismal font, and the confessional.
[1182–1188]

The *altar* is the central point of the church. On it Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the Cross is made present in the celebration of the Eucharist and the Easter meal is prepared. It is also the table to which the People of God are invited. The *tabernacle*, a kind of sacred safe, houses with the greatest honor in a most worthy place in the church the Eucharistic species in which the Lord himself is present. The so-called *perpetual lamp* indicates that the tabernacle is "occupied". If the lamp is not burning, the tabernacle is empty. The raised *chair* (Latin *cathedra*) of the → BISHOP or the priest means that ultimately Christ is the one who leads the congregation. The *ambo* (from Greek *anabainein* = to climb up), the lectern for the Word of God, should manifest the value and dignity of the biblical readings as the Word of the living God. Baptisms are performed at the *baptismal font*, and the *holy water font* should be a vivid reminder of our baptismal promises. A *confessional* or *confession room* is there so that we can acknowledge our guilt and receive forgiveness.

192 Can the Church also change and renew the liturgy?

There are changeable and unchangeable components of the → LITURGY. Unchangeable is everything that is of divine origin, for instance, the words of Jesus at the Last Supper. Then there are changeable parts, which the Church occasionally must change. After all, the mystery of Christ must be proclaimed, celebrated, and lived out at all times and in all places. [1200-1209]

Jesus effectively addressed the entire person: mind and understanding, heart and will. That is precisely what he wants to do today also in the → LITURGY. That is why it has different characteristics in Africa and in Europe, in nursing homes and at World Youth Days, and differs in appearance in parishes and monasteries. But it must still be recognizable that it is the one liturgy of the whole worldwide Church.



 There is ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all.

Eph 4:5-6

? **INITIATION**
(from Latin *initium* = beginning): the term for the introduction and integration of an outsider into an already existing community or fellowship.

