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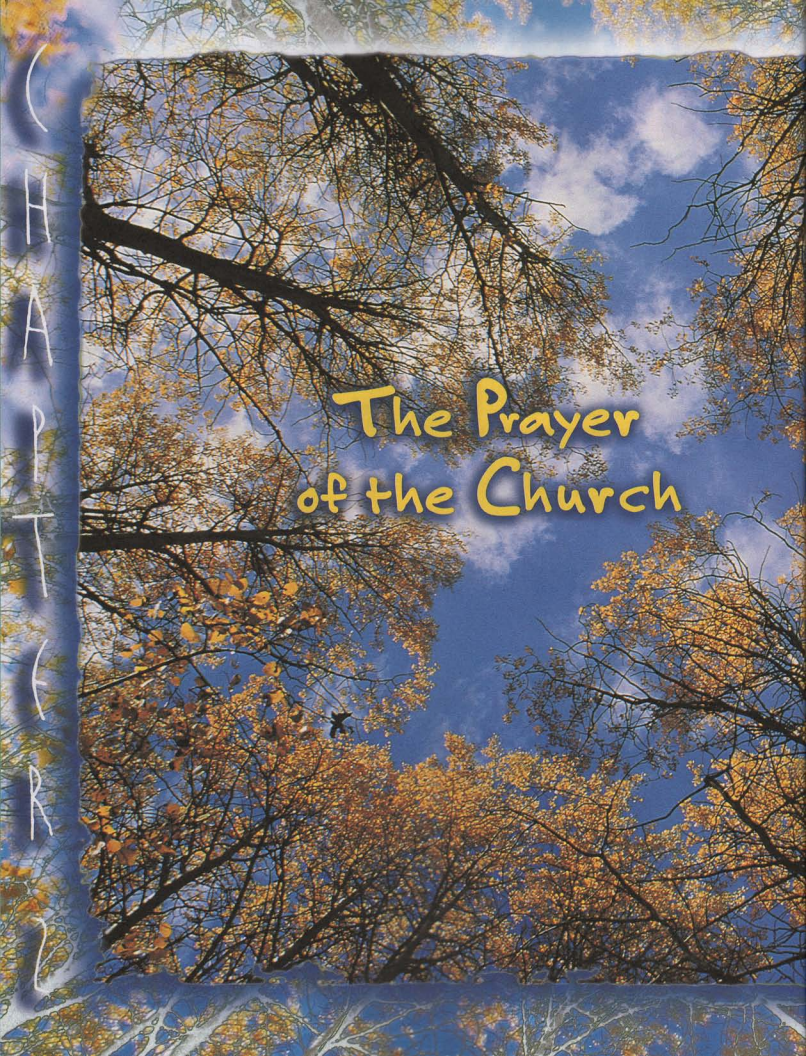
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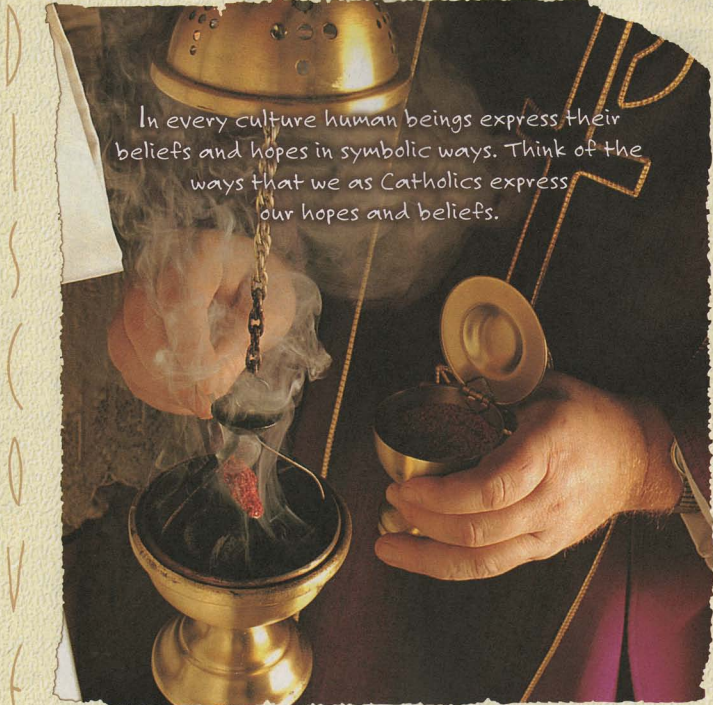


The Prayer
of the Church



Lord, teach us to pray.

Luke 11:1



In every culture human beings express their beliefs and hopes in symbolic ways. Think of the ways that we as Catholics express our hopes and beliefs.

Catholic Symbols and Rituals

Words alone can never fully express the deep meanings of our Catholic faith. Because we are human beings, because we have bodies and live in the world of created things, we often use symbols to express our thoughts and feelings, our understandings and insights. As we have seen, a symbol is an object or action that stands for something else. For example, people in love not only talk about loving each other; they also

exchange gifts. That is, they give symbols of their love. In the same way, when we celebrate our love relationship with God, we do so not only with words but also with objects and gestures. These are symbols, too.

When we Catholics pray together, we celebrate in and through *symbolic* activity. We must use the language of symbol in our prayer because we are

discovering and celebrating what is invisible to our eyes. Remember that signs and symbols put us in touch with what we cannot see. Catholic worship is filled with symbols: eating and drinking, being plunged into water and anointed with oil, standing and sitting, processing from place to place, raising our hands, speaking out and singing together. As Catholics we must never forget that these signs and symbols of our faith put us in touch with the divine. Through them we share in God's own divine life.

The church, the sacred place where we meet for worship, is full of symbols: light, fire, water, word, incense. Often the very architecture of a church is symbolic. Many of our churches are cross-shaped in design, a symbol of our redemption. Others are circular, symbolic of the public nature of our worship.

We use the things of this earth in our prayer because we believe that creation is good. By using created things, we worship the God of creation, the God who "looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good" (Genesis 1:31).

The prayer of the Church is not only *symbolic* activity; it is also *ritual* activity. Rituals are actions we do over and over in prescribed, formal, and set ways. In our daily lives we carry out many ritual actions. Can you think of some ordinary things we do ritually each day?

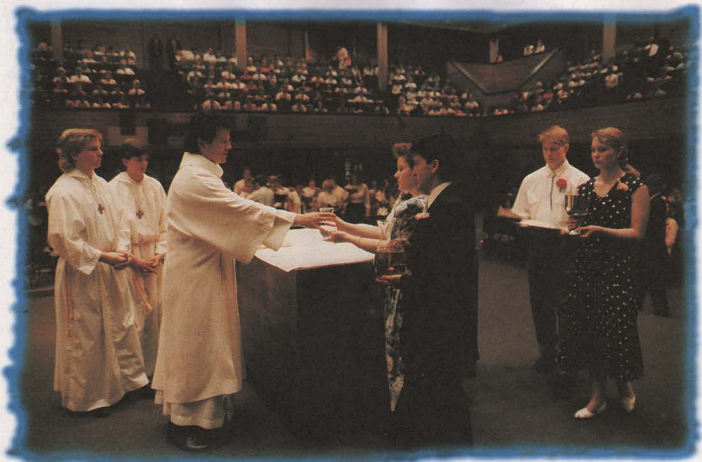
The prayer of the Church, too, is expressed in rituals. We do things over and over in prescribed, formal, and set ways. Rituals are characteristic of Catholic worship. It would be obvious to a visitor attending Mass for the first time that Catholics know the rituals and are comfortable with them. Catholics know "what happens next," what to expect. When the priest greets us with, "The Lord be with you," we respond, without any thought or hesitation, "And with your spirit." When the priest invites us, "Let us pray," we stand up. Our rituals help us to do together what we came to do: celebrate Christ's saving actions in our lives.

We Catholics perform many ritual actions during our liturgical celebrations. Perhaps you have never thought about the meaning of these rituals. But understanding what is being said and done through ritual helps us to participate in the prayer of the Church. This is true of anything we do. Isn't it true that the activities which we find boring are often the ones which we do not understand?

The same is true of the prayer of the Church. We can't participate well if we don't understand its symbols and rituals. In order to pray well and to come to know what that prayer means in daily life, it is important for us to acquire the skills and understanding that are necessary to celebrate the prayer of the Church with enthusiasm and joy.

In this course we will discover how Catholics have traditionally prayed and worshiped God. We will explore the liturgy and the sacraments, the Church year, and Catholic devotions. We will learn about the rituals and ceremonies that Catholics have used through the centuries to become God's friends. In this way we, too, can come to know how much we are loved by God. Through that knowledge we will come to appreciate even more what it means to be a Catholic.





A deacon accepting the offerings of bread and wine at the Preparation of the Gifts

The Prayer of the Church

Liturgy is the public prayer of the Church in which we proclaim and celebrate the mystery of Christ. Originally the word *liturgy* meant “a public work”—literally, a work for the people, for everyone.

Because the public prayer of the Church is for everyone, it came to be called *liturgy*, which now means “the participation of the people in the work of God.” What is the work of God? It is the work of our redemption; it is what Christ did for us. *Liturgy* is a work by and for the people, but above all it is God’s work. In *liturgy* the mission of Christ—the work of his passion, death, resurrection, and ascension—continues today.

Liturgical prayer, as God’s work and the work of the people, the Church, is a very particular kind of prayer. What are some of its characteristics?

Public First, as we have already seen, liturgical prayer is *public* prayer. Yet it is public in a very special way. Not all prayers said in public are liturgical. For example, a group of people may gather in church to say the rosary. Or perhaps you have seen pictures of the Holy Father on Good Friday leading the stations of the cross in the Coliseum in Rome. Hundreds of people participate. These are certainly public acts, but liturgical prayer is public in a deeper sense.

Liturgical prayer is public because each liturgical celebration, such as the Mass or the sacraments, includes, concerns, and affects the whole Church community. It is the official prayer of the Church. And because liturgical prayer is always for the entire Church, it is public even when only a small number of people are present.

Communal and Personal

Liturgy is the public prayer of the Church in worship of the Trinity. In the liturgy we pray with Christ, the head of the Church, and with his whole body, the Church on earth and in heaven. Now that's public!

Do you think it is possible to be both *public* and *personal* at the same time? Have you ever been with a group of people celebrating a victory, a memorial, or another special moment in life? You are all experiencing something together, but at the same time you are feeling it personally, individually.

That is what liturgy is like. It is a communal experience and a personal experience at the same time. Good liturgy is never private, but good liturgy is always personal.



Liturgy is the prayer of Christ.

What do you think might be some of the concerns of Christ that are expressed in the liturgy? Which of those concerns are yours as well?

Prayer of Christ Liturgical prayer is the prayer of Christ himself. Because it is the prayer of Christ, liturgical prayer has unique and special value above and beyond anything else we, as Church, could possibly do.

Worship of the Trinity Liturgical prayer is always prayer to the Blessed Trinity. Every liturgical celebration is offered in, with, and through *Jesus Christ*, in the unity of the *Holy Spirit*, to the honor and glory of the *Father*. Liturgical prayer is always worship of the Trinity.

Addressed to God Liturgical prayer is always addressed to God. Even when we honor Mary and the other saints in the liturgy, we praise and thank God for them. In our private prayer we are always free to call on Mary and the saints directly. In the liturgy, however, our focus is God. In our private prayer we can ask God for all sorts of things. In liturgical prayer, because it is the voice of Christ, we pray for those things that Christ wants. What things do you think Christ wants?

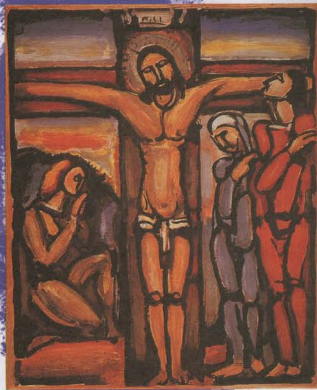
In the Words of the Church In our private prayer we are free to use whatever words we choose. We are encouraged to pray freely and spontaneously, both alone and sometimes with others. In liturgical prayer, however, we pray in the words and with the actions given to us by the Church. Words and actions, carefully preserved and treasured for centuries, are handed down to us in the rites and rituals given in liturgical books.

You may already be familiar with a few of these liturgical books. One, the large book that you see the priest use at the altar during Mass, is the sacramentary. It contains the prayers for the Eucharist. Another book you might know is the lectionary. The name comes from *lectio*, the Latin word for "reading." This is the book that the reader, or lector, carries in procession at the beginning of the Eucharist and from which the Scriptures are proclaimed.

CATHOLIC TEACHINGS

About Liturgy

The liturgy is the most important activity of the Church because it is the work of Christ himself. However, liturgy can never be the *only* activity of the Church. We must believe the good news and live as Jesus' disciples. This means we love and serve the Lord by loving and serving others. Liturgy sends us out to serve others, and that experience sends us back to celebrate liturgy. Liturgy and loving service form one unbroken circle.



The Crucifixion, Georges Rouault, 1939

From Death to Life

There is an ancient saying in the Church: “The way we pray shows what we believe.” The liturgy, the public prayer of the Church, is the official way we pray as Catholics. In what way does the prayer of the Church show what we believe?

What makes us who we are as Catholics is our relationship to the Father in and through Jesus Christ. We believe in Jesus Christ—in who he is and in what God has accomplished in him. What makes us Catholic is our belief in the paschal mystery of Jesus.

What is the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ? By the *paschal mystery* we mean all that God has done to redeem us in Christ Jesus, especially in his suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. We proclaim this paschal mystery at every Eucharist when we say:

We proclaim your Death, O Lord,
and profess your Resurrection
until you come again.

The word *paschal* refers to Passover, the feast of freedom for the people of Israel. During this great feast, the Jewish people celebrate their deliverance, their passing over, from slavery to freedom. During Holy Week and Easter, we Christians celebrate the “passing over” of Jesus from death to new life. As the liturgy tells us, Jesus Christ is now and always “our Passover and our lasting peace.”

Mystery means more than just something that cannot be fully understood. It also means a truth that continually calls us to deeper understanding, a truth so wonderful that we are continually drawn to investigate the depths of its meaning.

To discover what the paschal mystery really means is the work of a lifetime. Catholics believe that the birth, life, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ is the very center of all that exists. When Jesus, in his paschal mystery, passed from death to life, all of creation was made new—including ourselves. His new life is now our new life. It is the central vocation of every Christian to discover and live the meaning of Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection in today’s world. How do we do this?

Scripture UPDATE

The liturgy of the Church has adopted many Jewish liturgical symbols and rituals. Many of these are mentioned in Scripture: praying the psalms as responses; using musical instruments and incense in worship; setting aside one day a week, the Sabbath, as a day of rest and prayer. Among the most important of these practices that we still observe is the reading of the Old Testament in our liturgy. This practice is “irreplaceable” (*Catechism*, 1093).

Living the Paschal Mystery

The first step is to begin to develop a personal relationship with God, for it is our *person* that we bring to the public prayer of the Church. We do not come to the celebration of Christ's paschal mystery as strangers in God's presence or even as mere acquaintances. We come as Jesus' own friends and disciples, just as his first followers did.

Usually friendship does not just happen. We have to work at a relationship. We have to spend time with the other person. We have to develop common interests. We have to want what is good for the other, and we need to be willing to sacrifice for the other.

We become friends with God in much the same way, spending time with him, developing common interests, learning about God, sharing our concerns, our dreams, our hopes. That is what praying really is.

And even though we may not realize it, God is waiting for us to come to him. God, after all,

tops the list of those who love us. He sees, knows, and loves us as we really are. God shows his love for us through Jesus Christ and through the Church. And it is in praying with the Church "through Jesus Christ, our Lord" that we come to recognize and respond to him in a personal way.

If some people find the liturgy long or dull or boring, it may be because they have not yet grown up enough to establish a real relationship, a friendship with God.

As Saint Gregory of Nyssa, a fourth-century bishop, said, "The one thing worthwhile is becoming God's friend."



What is your relationship with God like? Do you work at it? How? Do you come to celebrate liturgy as a stranger, as an acquaintance, or as a friend?



TYPVS ORBIS TERR

HOMI-
NES HAC LEGE
SVNT GENERATI.
QVI TVERENTVR
ILLVM GLOBVM.
QVEM IN HOC TEM-
PLO MEDIVM VI-
DES. QVAE TER-
RA DICITVR.
Cicero.

A Little History

A great part of understanding something is knowing where it comes from, its history. Most of us probably enjoy looking through family albums or other family mementos. These things tell us something about the lives of our parents and grandparents. They are part of our family history, a history that shapes our lives.

How did liturgy come to be the way it is today? Our liturgical family has a history, too, a history that has helped to shape our Catholic life. It is a rich and interesting history formed by many languages, many cultures, and many historical events.

What are the roots of our liturgical life? Where do these symbols and rituals come from? We begin with Jesus himself. As we shall see, it is really Jesus who gives us the sacraments and entrusts them to the Church.

When the Son of God became one of us, he did so in a particular culture: Jesus was a Jew who lived in first-century Palestine. His first followers were also Jews. They prayed as Jews. After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, they continued to pray in the Temple in Jerusalem on the Sabbath. But now they did something new as well.

We read that “every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes” (Acts 2:46). In the Temple they listened to readings from the Old Testament and responded with psalms and prayers. In their homes they shared the Eucharist, as Jesus had instructed them. Even at this early date, we can trace the origin of the two parts of the Mass as we know them today: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

As the good news of Jesus spread from Palestine to Syria, Greece, Africa, and the ends of the Roman Empire, the message was translated into new languages and planted in new cultures. Greek was the common language spoken at that time, so the gospels and the letters of Saint Paul were written in Greek. Later, when Latin became the official language of the Roman Empire, both the Bible and the liturgy were translated into Latin. For many centuries the Latin language served as the principal means

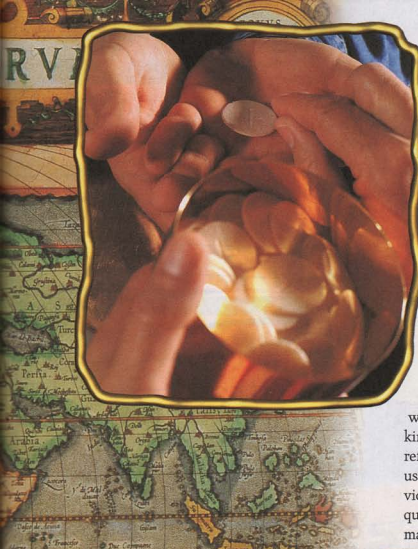
for understanding and explaining our faith.

It is still used as the official language of the Church in important documents, such as papal encyclicals.



QVID EI POTEST VIDERI MAGNVM IN REBVS HVMAN-
NITAS OMNIS. TOTIVSQUE MVNDI NOTA SIT MAGNIT

HOC
EST PVNCTVM.
QVOD INTER TOT
GENTES FERRO
ET IGNI DIVIDI-
VR, O QVAM RIDI-
CVLI SVNT MOR-
TALIVM TER-
MINI!
Seneca.



The Liturgy Today

In what ways do we still celebrate the liturgy as the early Christians did? How are we different?

We no longer go to the temple for prayer; instead we go to our parish churches. But we still read the same readings and pray the same psalms as the first Christians did. We no longer read the Scriptures in Latin, as the Romans did; now we read them in our own language. We celebrate the same breaking of the bread, the same Eucharist. The most important parts of the liturgy have not changed. They have been given to us just as they were given to the first followers of Jesus.

Yet our culture today does influence some aspects of liturgy because our culture expresses who we are and what we believe. For example, the kind of music we play and sing at the liturgy is a reflection of our culture. Various instruments are used in church music: pipe organ, guitars, drums, violins, and flutes. The music can range from the quiet reflection of chant to the exuberance of a mariachi band.

The question of change—of what should or should not be changed based on changing culture—is always a very important and serious question for the Church. It is the Church that teaches and guides us in what can be changed and what can never be changed. For example, for two thousand years we have celebrated the Eucharist as the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection. Through sacramental signs we share in this mystery of faith. Bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. This will never change. How wonderful it is that the Church guides us to this truth and will do so for all time.

CATHOLIC ID

The liturgy is a major part of the tradition of the Church. The word *tradition* means "what is handed down." Because the liturgy is handed down to us from the earliest days of the Church, we look to the teaching authority of the Church to guide our liturgical celebration.

But the liturgy is also flexible and open to various cultures. Can you discover unique cultural expressions in African liturgical worship? Latin American? Asian? Magazines from missionary societies may help you with your search.



"The way we pray shows what we believe." Give one example from the liturgy that shows what we believe as Catholics.

CVI AETER:
O. CICERO:

VTINAM
QVEMADMO:
DVM VNIVERSA
MVNDI FACIES
IN CONSPECTVM
VENIT. ITA PHI:
LOSOPHIA TOTA
NOBIS POSSET
OCCVRRERE.
Seneca

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things to think about

What comes to your mind when you say to yourself or someone else, "I'm Catholic"? Think about the words, feelings, or images the word *Catholic* has for you. Brainstorm with your group. Do these ideas have anything to do with prayer or liturgy? Where does Jesus fit in?

things to share

Do you think that you would live any differently if you did not believe in Jesus? Try to imagine how your life would be different if you were not a Catholic. Discuss this with several of your friends.

WORDS TO REMEMBER

Find and define the following:

liturgy _____

paschal mystery _____

Online

WITH THE PARISH

The Church is universal, welcoming all peoples and cultures. It might be interesting to discover in your parish or diocese how differing cultural expressions in language, music, and other ways to celebrate are encouraged in the liturgy. One way to experience this might be to join in a liturgy celebrated in a language other than your own. Share your reactions with your group.

"The way we pray shows what we believe." Explain.

Testing 1, 2, 3

1

What does the word *liturgy* mean? Name five characteristics of liturgical prayer.

2

What does the word *mystery* mean?

3

What difference does the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ make in our lives?

4

Give an example of how our contemporary culture is expressed in the liturgy.

5

Life in the Spirit

In personal, private prayer we can say anything we want to God. We can pray anytime, anywhere, for any amount of time. Simply thinking quiet, grateful thoughts about God or saying the holy name of Jesus quietly to yourself is prayer. Praying alone is good preparation for liturgical prayer because private prayer also helps us to become aware of the presence of Christ in our lives.

Symbols used in the liturgy can help us focus when we pray privately. Candles, pictures, incense, music—these are symbols that can remind us of God's presence. Which ones do you find helpful?