



newspringtime
COMMUNITY

Catechism Commentary Week 25 on Celebrating the Christian Mystery

The English word liturgy is derived from two Greek words which could be translated as the people's work, specifically public worship of the divinity. Last year I mentioned that there are three interrelated liturgies those of the heart, altar and heaven.

The liturgy of the heart

The liturgy of the heart is something which the Holy Spirit is constantly praying in every baptised person, whether we are aware of it or not. "...the Spirit too comes to help us in our weakness, for, when we do not know how to pray properly, then the Spirit personally makes our petitions for us in groans that cannot be put into words" (Rm 8:26). In the deepest part of our being the Spirit is praying "Abba, Father" in us. If this is true, then the purpose of prayer is simply to bring us into contact with this prayer that is already being prayed in us. St Patrick spoke about it in par. 25 of his *Confessions*, "Another time, I saw in me one who was praying. It was as if I were inside my body, and I heard above me, that is, above my inner self. He prayed strongly, with sighs. I was amazed and astonished, and pondered who it was who prayed in me; but at the end of the prayer, it was clear that it was the Spirit. At this I awoke, and I remembered the apostle saying: "The Spirit helps the weaknesses of our prayer; for we do know what it is we should pray, but the very Spirit pleads for us with unspeakable sighs, which cannot be expressed in word." And again: "The Lord is our advocate, and pleads for us."

The liturgy of the altar

Unless the human heart is awakened to the praying voice of the Spirit within, it will not appreciate what is done at mass when we offer corporate worship to God the Father through his Son Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. The priest offers the Eucharistic Prayer in the first-person plural, for example, "Therefore, O Lord, we humbly implore you..." This "we" signifies that all the baptized who are present at the Eucharistic celebration make the sacrificial offering in union with Christ and pray the Eucharistic Prayer in union with the priest who represents Christ the head of his body the Church. And what is most important is that we not only offer Christ; we are called to *offer ourselves*, our lives, and our individual efforts so as to grow more like Christ. All of this is addressed to the Father in union with Christ through the hands of the priest in the power of the Holy Spirit. Most wonderful of all, although our offering is in

itself imperfect, joined with the offering of Christ it becomes *perfect* praise and thanksgiving to the Father.

The liturgy of heaven

The purest form of liturgy is that which is celebrated in heaven by Mary, the archangels, angels and all those who have been saved. The liturgies of the heart and the altar are earthly participations in the primordial liturgy of heaven. We get a glimpse of what it is like from the Book of Revelation. For example, in Rev 7:9-12. "After this I looked, and there was an enormous crowd — no one could count all the people! They were from every race, tribe, nation, and language, and they stood in front of the throne and of the Lamb, dressed in white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They called out in a loud voice: "Salvation comes from our God, who sits on the throne, and from the Lamb!" All the angels stood round the throne, the elders, and the four living creatures. Then they threw themselves face downwards in front of the throne and worshipped God, saying, "Amen! Praise, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honour, power, and might belong to our God for ever and ever! Amen!"

What has been said indicates why the Church maintains that the liturgy "is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed, and it is likewise the font from which all her power flows." One is reminded in this context of a verse in Ps 22:3, "God you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel." As we lift up our minds and hearts in worship of God, the Lord lives in those prayers of thanksgiving and praise as a divine presence and power.