

Prayer 1:

Liturgical and Common Prayer

What is prayer?

No place is a more important starting point than to define and explain prayer. Most people think of prayer in the context of what is said or how one acts. Prayer is a conversation with God. Prayer in the gaze of love directed towards God. Prayer is life. We have many definitions of prayer, but the reality is that prayer is something that God does in and through us. We have the mentality that *we do* prayer. But God gave us his Spirit so that his Spirit can pray in a way that we cannot. For this reason we need to see prayer from two different angles: God is the one who prays in and through us, and prayer is the ascent of the mind and heart to a God who love us. From this definition prayer can take on many different appearances and forms as long as they all center on God and coming to know and love him.

What do we mean by liturgy and liturgical prayer?

This session focuses primarily on liturgical prayer. At the end of this section on prayer we will discuss other forms of prayer. The most common form of prayer we all experience is liturgical prayer. The word liturgy comes from two Greek words: λαος (laos) – people, and εργος (ergos) – word. Liturgy is the work of the people or a public work. In the Greco-Romans times people from the town would gather together to engage in a public work or a work that benefits the town, people, country, or world. These projects included the building of a temple, a gymnasium, a forum or market, or any other work that would be of public use. The forms of prayer classified as liturgy are meant to have the same mentality. Our liturgical prayers are not meant for our exclusive benefit but for the benefit of all people and the world.

The most commonly used definition of liturgical prayer is the seven sacraments and the liturgy of the hours. As I read and explore what the Church classifies as liturgical prayer, I am realizing that this definition is not expansive enough. Liturgical prayer includes the seven Sacraments, the Liturgy of the Hours, Liturgy of the Word, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and those rites and actions associated with liturgy and the Sacraments. To help you understand these forms of prayer I am going to briefly explain each one and the reason they are forms of liturgical prayer.

All forms of liturgical prayer have some basic components that define them as liturgical prayer. They all have their rules and structure set by the Church. The people of the Church are not meant to create their own forms of liturgical prayer but that God set the rules and form so that all liturgical prayers center on his will and his ways. We do not create the works through which the world will be sanctified, God does that. Therefore no one except the bishop of the region and the Pope can enact change to any liturgical prayer. The second main component of all liturgical prayer is that readings from Scripture form an essential part of the prayer. In some of the forms of prayer we do not necessarily experience Scripture in the same way, but is an essential part of liturgical prayer. The third important element is that the prayer illustrates part of Jesus' mission to save the world and bring all people into his life. These forms of prayer are not meant simply for the good or the feelings of those present. Liturgical prayer should teach us God's ways

through the structure and form of prayer and help us to recognize God's will and his plan of salvation. Lastly, liturgical prayers are essentially communal. Each of the seven Sacraments and the Liturgy of the Hours are intended to be prayed with a community present since they are the work of the people.

The Seven Sacraments

Baptism: Baptism is the easiest to see the connection between Jesus' mission and the purpose of the Sacrament. This Sacrament invites people into life with God, cleanses them of sin, and provides entry into the Church. As such, this Sacrament is necessary for salvation. Only through baptism are we brought into the life of God and made his people. Baptisms are always celebrated with readings that center on the purpose and importance of baptism so as to guide the people to understand the Sacrament. The Rite of Baptism has six key elements to it: the renunciation of sin, the cleansing with water, the anointing with Chrism, the clothing with the white garment, the handing on of the light of Christ, and the presentation to the community. Notice how these parts of the Sacrament are focused on this person's relation to the community and world. Renunciation of sin and the cleansing of water shows that the person has become a new creation. The white garment and lit candle are signs to the world of this new life calling all people to experience this new life through the person. The anointing with Chrism gives the person a task, a mission, a call which is essentially Jesus' call to bring people into his life.

Eucharist: we normally connect the Eucharist to the consecrated wafer which we consume at Mass. The Eucharist cannot be understood apart from the celebration of the Mass. During the Mass we hear from Scripture which informs us of God's ways, we offer our prayers for the world, we offer ourselves in money, word, and deed, and then we become what we celebrate. The Mass showcases all of these elements. The Eucharistic Prayers focus exclusively on the offering of the bread and wine, symbolic of our lives, for the sake of the salvation of the world: for as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup we proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. The Mass is not meant to be a spectator sport. Each person who is present is called to give of themselves at the Mass so that they can participate in the saving mission of God. As Johannes Emminghaus states in his book *Eucharist*: a person should not receive the Eucharist unless that person has given at least a dollar. His point is that we must give of ourselves if we are to receive from God.

Penance, Confession, Reconciliation: This Sacrament is the hardest one to point out the liturgical elements in it. A communal reconciliation service more clearly shows its communal nature. During a reconciliation service readings from Scripture are read, the people hear God speak to them through the homily, and everyone takes time to acknowledge their sins. This service is communal: we hurt one another therefore we must ask one another for forgiveness. The priest acts as the Church in offering forgiveness to the person who has caused harm against other members of the Church and world. The priest also acts as Christ offering the same forgiveness that Jesus gave to those who came to him during his years of ministry. Jesus came to forgive sins and set people free from the burden of sin, for this reason the Sacrament of Reconciliation is considered a Sacrament. Our sins are essentially communal and affect people. Therefore our request for forgiveness is not a selfish desire to be free of the guilt but a recognition of the

healing that needs to be done on account of our sins. The penance a priest gives is the clearest sign of the work being done for the benefit of the world. The priest assigns an act so that we can start to undo the problems we have caused in the world and bring healing.

Confirmation: the Sacrament of Confirmation is still searching for a deeper theology. Originally Confirmation was connected with Baptism and celebrated simultaneously. In our modern age the Sacrament of Confirmation is normally disconnected from Baptism. Confirmation is the sealing of the person with the Holy Spirit echoing the event of Pentecost. This person, now sealed with the Holy Spirit, is called to go out into the world and bring God's Spirit to the places they encounter. The Chrismation of the person with the Chrism oil shows the anointing common for kings, priests, and prophets. All these functional roles are meant for the good of society. Lastly, confirmation answers the question: what am I? I am a member of God's chosen people called to bring his message to the people and show God's mercy.

Anointing of the Sick: Jesus came to heal the sick. The Anointing of the Sick is a specific expression of God's will to heal all people. This Sacrament brings together the two main forms of healing: body and soul. It focuses on the need for all people to experience God's healing presence through the restoration of the body and the forgiveness of sins. The majority of anointings take place in private settings separate from the community. The expected celebration of this Sacrament is in the context of the Mass where the community can join in prayer for the healing of the person (people) to be anointed. The Anointing of the Sick is also a clear sign to the world that God is active and alive and will continue to bring healing to those who ask, something we often forget.

Sacrament of Matrimony: Why should people get married? The general answer, because they love one another. The Church's answer, for the good of the social order. Matrimony is intrinsically communal. The wedding has an official of the Church, witnesses of the marriage, and a community gathered in support of the couple. People attend a wedding to support the couple in their new life together. The couple, in response to the community, shows God's love through the joys and struggles of living a life together, brings forth children that perpetuate the society, and remind people of the difficulties of commitment. Thus marriage is necessary for a well-ordered society. Like the other Sacraments readings from Scripture, rites that define and explain marriage, and a communal celebration are essential elements of the marriage rite.

Sacrament of Holy Orders: The three levels of Holy Orders are deacon, priest, and bishop. These three levels are ordered to the service of God's people and the world. During the ordination rite, the man lays prostrate on the floor signifying his death to self and his gift to the world of his life. The priest and bishop are anointed for their service of God's people. The priest's hands are anointed with Sacred Chrism so that they are set apart for the celebration of the Eucharist. The bishop's head is anointed with Sacred Chrism in preparation for the miter (his hat) and as a sign of the Holy Spirit coming upon him like the Apostles. The deacon, priest, and bishop become signs to the world of something greater to come, signs of God's enduring presence with his people, signs that there is more to this world than what we see and feel. The Sacrament of Holy Orders connects with Jesus' mission to give himself for the forgiveness of sins and to offer the

prayers of the people to the Father for the salvation of the world. The priest and bishop partake of this saving mission through their celebration of the Sacraments.

The other liturgical prayers:

The last section covered the seven Sacraments. As I mentioned in the beginning of this session liturgical prayer consists of the seven Sacraments, the Liturgy of the Hours, Liturgy of the Word, and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

Liturgy of the Hours: a vast majority of the people have never heard of this form of prayer. It originates with the Apostles who would go to the synagogue to pray several times a day. The liturgy of the Hours consists of eight times of prayer throughout the day called hours. Generally those required to pray the Liturgy of the Hours, namely deacons, priests, bishops, and consecrated religious, pray five hours a day with three optional hours. These hours include Office of Readings (Vigils), Morning Prayer (Lauds), Mid-morning, day, or afternoon prayer (Midday Prayer), Evening Prayer (Vespers), Night Prayer (Compline), (Nocturne). (The words in parentheses are the more formal names typically used by religious communities) Each hour consists of three psalms or parts of psalms with a reading from Scripture, and a final prayer. Morning, Evening and Night Prayer have one of the three great canticles – The Canticle of Zechariah, the Canticle of Mary, and the Canticle of Simeon. Morning and Evening prayer also have intercessions and feel similar to the Mass from which they are derived. The Office of Readings contains two long readings, one from Scripture and one from the treasury of the Church like the Fathers, the Council documents, or a saint. The purpose of the hours is to sanctify the day through prayer. Each hour is considered communal and is meant to be prayer with and for the church and the people of God.

Liturgy of the Word: this form of liturgical prayer is like the Mass but without the consecration of the bread and wine. It consists of readings from Scripture, a homily, and intercessory prayers. Again, we are praying for the world and offering ourselves even without the consecration.

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament: This form of prayer is only a liturgical prayer when a deacon or priest presides and the rites for Benediction are used. This prayer consists of hymns, prayers, and times of silent prayer, ending with a blessing with the consecrated host. Individual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament without a priest or deacon presiding is not liturgical prayer. Adoration is considered liturgical prayer because it is connected with the Eucharist and an extension of the Mass, which is both a Sacrament and a communal form of prayer.

Common Prayers:

We only have one common prayer that we use that is not considered a devotional prayer and not liturgical prayer: the Our Father. This prayer is given to us by Jesus himself and considered one of the treasures of the Church. In this prayer we are praying as Jesus did, as his people, and recognizing the specific ways in which God has shown himself to us, told us how to pray, and guided us to understand how to pray. The prayer is communal in nature from the opening word of “our.”