



Catechesis For the Masses

Basic Teachings on Liturgy and Participation in the Mass in Both Forms.

Part 5: Restful Participation in Liturgy

“**A**nd on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation” (Genesis 2:2-3.)

The familiar quote above is often cited as a reminder to follow the Third Commandment to “Remember to keep holy the Sabbath,” as well as in exhorting us to “go to Church on Sunday and avoid all unnecessary work.” However, have we ever considered that these words tell *more about heavenly rest* than earthly rest? It is in the understanding of the “eternal rest” of heaven that I wish to expound upon here in this column, showing how our “active participation” in the liturgy of the Church is both a foretaste and a sharing in the true rest of heaven.

Years ago, a elementary school age child asked me: “If Sunday is a day of rest, how come you have to work [by having Masses]?” This innocent question provides a great entrance into “why” we worship on Sunday (as opposed to having Mass on a “work” day): because Mass is not primarily understood as work, but as an entrance into resting in Christ. How can this be a source of rest - especially since the Church’s word to describe worship, that is, “liturgy,” means “work”? While Mass certainly is a work, more properly it is the work that Christ himself has carried out and accomplished for our sake - that we might receive salvation. In other words, the “work” of the Mass is not ours to do for God; it is His work for us that offers us an entrance into sharing in His own life, both now on earth and particularly in the eternal life of heaven. There-

fore, the “work” of the Mass is less about what you or I do; it is more about what you and I are privileged to receive from God Himself through the saving work of Jesus being made present to us in the gift and mystery of the Eucharistic sacrifice. It is this “receiving” of God’s grace that I call “restful participation.”

“Fine....but what does this ‘*restful participation*’ really look like? After all, there is still much ‘to do’ during Mass; Mass doesn’t offer itself....” First of all, we need to recognize that rest does not mean a total diverting of our interest and attention from one thing (in this case, work,) to something completely different (what is not work.) Instead, might we take our first clue from the quoted scripture of Genesis 2:2-3: that God Himself “rested” from his work. To say that God rested is to say that he rejoiced in and gave appreciation to the work that He had completed. Such rest is comparable to you or me “resting” in the completion of a job well done or in having a celebratory moment consequent to a work or an accomplishment that we have just completed. Given this type of appreciative or celebratory rest, we can easily make the link to our participation in the Mass as being “restful” insofar as the “work” of the Mass is all about celebrating and rejoicing in what God has accomplished for our sake. Therefore, all of the prayers, the singing, and even the “smells and bells,” if you would of a Mass are a resting in the work that God has accomplished for us in Christ Jesus.

Taking this type of approach to resting in the Lord and in His works has very significant (and truly beautiful) effects on our approach to worship. In general, once we recognize that the Mass is the work of

Christ for us, we can already rest in the truth that our first and fundamental call is to simply come with faith and openness (as has already been discussed in the earlier column on true worship.) Such an approach of faith and openness to Mass (or to any of the sacraments) can change our whole outlook on the “work” of the worship, from one tending toward seeing worship as our own to control toward an approach of learning to live in relationship with Jesus and His saving works. Practically speaking, this way of living means that every particular ritual detail, every proper liturgical ministry, every word of prayer, etc., is a way to rejoice in the Lord, giving thanks for all that He has accomplished in us, celebrating rightly that which He desires for us - even when our “words” of prayer are offered as petitions or requests from God. For in such an approach, the focus of worship is clearly upon God’s love for us, and therefore we are able to avoid the tendency of seeing the work of worship as “our own,” not judging its meaning and effectiveness according to how we contribute to it or by our own perception of what makes it meaningful or relevant.

To take this idea one step further, consider that we all carry out works in life that are at the same time restful. Mindful that God has blessed each one of us with particular charisms (that is, gifts of the Spirit that are entrusted to each of us individually for the building up of the whole Church,) think momentarily in your own life about a task (or work) that you do that energizes you - to the point where this task does not feel at all like work. In the same fashion, our true “active participation” in the liturgy of the Church is meant to be a “work” that is restful and re-energizing. Whether we have a defined role at Mass or simply come to worship as one among many in the pews, full participation in the Mass that is rooted in receptivity to God’s gifts of grace will become “restful” as we become more conscious that our “doing” at Mass is a way of living. For example, while it is true that all of us are to “act” by saying the prayers, such activity has the power to become a part of us such that it is not



John’s vision of heavenly worship in the Book of Revelation includes imagery of bowing down in worship to the Lamb of God. Such worship is the essence of our heavenly resting in the Lord - where God will be all in all.

“Mystic Lamb” by Jan van Eyck (circa 1390–1441), Public Domain. Original found in Saint Bavo Cathedral, Ghent, Belgium.

work at all - but a way of restful life in the presence of the Lord. Similarly, all of the various ministries (reader, server, etc.,) when exercised as a response to gifts given by God, become “restful” wherein God’s work of salvation remains primary and our “service” is a sharing in the rest that is being offered to us. Such restfulness is a true foretaste of heaven - as heaven is the living of perfect love and worship of God.

Recognizing that such an approach to worship as a way of resting in the Lord may be unfamiliar, know that such an approach can be learned. Accordingly, might I invite you to prayerfully “rest” in these truths, praying to know how to worship restfully in what is first and foremost the work of Jesus Christ for salvation. Pray that the Lord may make known to you his gift of grace that you may always be able to share in the work of worship in the most restful way.