



# *Catechesis For the Masses*

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

## *Session 2: Encountering the Mystery of God - Right Worship*

### **Goals of This Session:**

- To give an overview of the true nature of worship as a means of being in right relationship with God, and how it is God Himself who establishes this relationship and provides us with the way (through worship) to live that relationship.
  - ◆ We will briefly consider who God is and who we called to be in relationship with Him as His creatures.
  - ◆ Citing the reflections of Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI,) we will confront the current state of liturgical prayer in the Church with the aim of being renewed and aided in our own approach to worshiping unto more perfect relationship with God and all His people.
- We will propose the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary as a way to assist us in practicing right worship so as to encounter God's generous love more fully and perfectly in our lives.

### **Who is God? Who are we called to be in relationship with Him?**

- God and His Attributes: when we say that God is "mysterious," we acknowledge that God in His very being is both knowable and beyond our knowing:
  - ◆ God is the perfection of all "being;" He lacks nothing of the "true, good, and beautiful."
  - ◆ God is Love - He is "personal," in His own being Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; in His relating to those whom He creates, sustains, loves.
  - ◆ While His perfection is beyond our limited nature to comprehend, He wills to reveal Himself (His life, His nature, His being) to us - that we might share in His perfection, just as He wills.
- In His love, God creates man, male and female, in His own image of love - for love.
  - ◆ Our God given purpose: to share in the life and love of God, as He wills such for us.
  - ◆ As He loves us, He wills to reveal Himself to us, and in particular, to reveal Himself in the person of the Son who takes upon Himself our human nature in the Incarnation. By His taking of our nature, He takes upon Himself our weakness and limitation, so that what was lost through sin might be redeemed. By way of this great mystery through which God saves His people from sin, He willing "lowers" Himself (from His true glory in Heaven) that we might be lifted up to Him.
  - ◆ Additionally, through this same mystery of the Incarnation, Jesus Christ reveals to us the way to be in relationship with Him forever; we cannot attain such a relationship by our own efforts; it is only through Jesus Christ Himself that we (limited as we are) can live in right relationship with He who is perfect life and love.
  - ◆ This true relationship, established by Christ through his saving works, is offered to us in the liturgy of the Church. It is therefore in our "right" worship of God that we live the relationship now, unto the eternal relationship of heaven.

### **True and False Worship**

- True worship of God necessarily is rooted in what God first reveals and gives to us - for we, in our limitation, could never attain a right relationship with God by our own willing it; our limited nature cannot attain to his perfection.
- Rather, true worship is "instituted" by His own "coming to us," drawing us up into Himself - through sign and symbol.
- "Participation" in worship, then, is centered in receptivity to God and his works for us; not our own efforts.

- ◆ Consider this illustration by Cardinal Ratzinger, speaking on the nature of the true worship:
 

“Man himself cannot simply ‘make’ worship. If God does not reveal himself, man is clutching empty space. Moses says to Pharaoh: ‘[W]e do not know with what we must serve the Lord’ (Exodus 10:26). These words display a fundamental law of all liturgy. When God does not reveal himself, man can, of course, from the sense of God within him, build altars ‘to an unknown god’ (cf. Acts 17:23). He can reach out toward God in his thinking and try to feel his way toward him. But real liturgy implies that God responds and reveals how we can worship him. In any form, liturgy includes some kind of ‘institution.’ It cannot spring from imagination, our own creativity – then it would remain just a cry in the dark or mere self-affirmation. Liturgy implies a real relationship with Another, who reveals himself to us and gives our existence a new direction.” (Ratzinger, pages 21-22.)
- ◆ His illustration continues by recounting the story of the “golden calf,” fashioned by Aaron while Moses was away having ascended Mount Sinai (Exodus 32). This incident is not merely “idolatry,” (as the people’s intent with the image was *not* to worship an alien god;) it was more properly speaking an act of turning away from true worship (as revealed by God) to a false worship, rooted in their own sense of need to have access to God according to their own sensibilities.
- ◆ In conclusion, Cardinal Ratzinger points out how this incident is not an act of true worship, but one of “self-affirmation,” as the people turn inward on themselves, seeking to gratify themselves rather than remaining faithful to what God revealed.

### Where do we stand today?

- While the “forms” of worship today are multiple (Ordinary and Extraordinary,) the nature of the worship is meant to be consistent; that is, the source of worship being God’s revelation to us (and not our own efforts) is unchanging. The words of Cardinal Ratzinger provide us with an entrance to an honest assessment of today’s practices:
  - ◆ What is our approach the celebration of the Holy Mass in either/both forms? Is it a disposition of being receptive, humble, and obedient, with openness to God’s transcendence? Or is it a disposition of ownership or of an expectation that it ought to be for our affirmation and relevance, or for a particular intellectual or emotional need - lowering God to our level?
  - ◆ Are we convinced that right worship of God is first and foremost given to us from above; or is our thought that our worship is to be “our worship,” founded upon our own initiative and efforts (as this is what makes for “sincere” worship?)
  - ◆ Do we have trust in God, that we can “rest” in him through the worship of the Church as handed down to us - that as we are limited and lack full comprehension of God and his infinite perfection, we trust that He comes to us to take us more perfectly to Himself? Or are we in any way lacking of such trust, such that we set up our own “golden calf,” by approaching worship from the realm personal tastes, perceiving ritual acts according to our own sense of “sincere” worship? (Please note: that this last question cuts both ways, whether one is a devotee of the Ordinary Form or the Extraordinary Form.)
- Praise God for this Providential Moment! If we honestly assess ourselves, opening ourselves to more perfect worship (that God himself can lead us toward,) the Lord can accomplish the true, the good, and the beautiful in each one of us!

### Conclusion: Consider the Blessed Virgin Mary and her “participation” in the saving works of God:

- ◆ At the Annunciation: Surprised as she was by the announcement of Gabriel, she responds with her whole being: “I am the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to they word.”
- ◆ At the Visitation: She responds to Elizabeth’s words of praise with praises offered to God: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord...”
- ◆ At the Presentation and upon finding Jesus in the Temple: “She pondered these [words, things] in her heart.”
- ◆ At Cana: Having interceded for the newly-wed couple, she says to the servants: “Do whatever he tells you.”
- ◆ At Calvary: She silently perseveres in witnessing the crucifixion of her son and receives from him the vocation of motherhood over all the living: “Woman, behold your son,” thus receiving clearly and fully her eternal vocation.

**Key Source: Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger: *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000.**