



Catechesis For the Masses

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

Session 3: All About Active Participation

Goals of This Session:

- To define the term “fully conscious and active participation” (that was used by the Second Vatican Council) in keeping with its original use and intent, mindful of its historical development over nearly 130 years leading to Vatican II.
 - ◆ There will be a brief history of the use of this term - where it came from; the original context for its use; and the like.
 - ◆ We’ll see how the term came into the Church’s official vocabulary prior to its use by the Second Vatican Council in the “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” and what was intended.
- Having considered the historical development of the term, we will look to apply it in the most proper way, remaining aware of how it has been used since Vatican II, both correctly and incorrectly.
- Above all, this treatment of active participation seeks to aid each one of us in “living” our right participation in God’s savings works - toward the ultimate participation in the life of God in His kingdom.

History of the term “Active Participation.”

- 1833- Solesmes, France: French Benedictine Congregation - The beginning of “The Liturgical Movement.”
- Throughout the 19th Century in Europe, the work initiated by Solesmes is advanced, particularly by the Benedictines, as other monasteries join in efforts of restoring liturgical life and in seeking to form the people in liturgical practice toward their more fruitful participation.
- First official use of the term: November 22, 1903: Instruction on Sacred Music, *Tra le sollecitudini*, of Pope Pius X.:
 - ◆ Key quote: “Filled as We are with a most ardent desire to see the true Christian spirit flourish in every respect and be preserved by all the faithful, We deem it necessary to provide before anything else for the sanctity and dignity of the temple, in which the faithful assemble for no other object than that of acquiring this spirit from its foremost and indispensable font, which is the active participation (*participatio actuosa*) in the most holy mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church.”
 - ◆ Note the context: the quote is part of his introduction to an instruction on sacred music (which in 1903 had suffered from influences of art and entertainment, become decadent and often more performance and less about prayer.)
- Pope Pius XII, in his Encyclical On the Sacred Liturgy, *Mediator Dei*, (November 20, 1947) gives clearer indication about the essence of this “active participation”: that it is foremost an “interior” participation:
 - ◆ Paragraph 23 - worship is both “interior” and “exterior,” as our human nature (union of body and soul) requires such.
 - ◆ Paragraph 24 - in acknowledging the need for both, he says the primary element is that of the “interior,” as to carry out the external acts without a proper interior intention would reduce it to formalism without any meaning.
 - ◆ Paragraphs 29-32 speak of the relationship between the graces that God gives through the sacraments themselves and the ways of personal piety. He acknowledges another “both/and”: that as the graces of the sacraments are essential for living the Christian life, so devotion (or piety) can lead to greater worship in offering of ourselves to God.
 - ◆ Paragraphs 104-106 - Mindful that baptism is the foundation of our participation in the works of God, he praises efforts to form people in their familiarity with the parts of the Mass, especially the chants, that they may be lead to union with Christ.

- Vatican II - the goal above all others is the “fully conscious and active participation” of the faithful in the sacred rites. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC) uses this term multiple times. Context of these uses are important:
 - ◆ The first 13 paragraphs of the document give an introduction to the meaning and purpose of liturgy, noting such details as how the liturgy is the accomplishing of Christ’s saving works, that it is a foretaste of heaven, and that the faithful should approach this “source and summit” of the faith with the right disposition and awareness of Christ’s saving works, so as to cooperate with the graces given.
 - ◆ No. 14 gives the explicit reference to “fully conscious and active participation” being the chief aim of the council, with paragraphs 15-19 showing that this aim is to be accomplished through formation and catechesis of both the clergy and the laity.
 - ◆ No. 21: rites should be easily understood by the people (this does not mean abandoning Latin however, as said in no. 36.)
 - ◆ No. 30: the responses and acclamations are ways for the faithful to participate, mindful too of times of silence.
 - ◆ No. 48. “The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration....they should learn also to offer themselves....so that finally God may be all in all.”

Renewing our Approach to “Active Participation”

- Given our survey of the history of this term, an attempt to summarize its meaning envisions “fully conscious and active participation” more about “being” and less about “doing.”
 - ◆ As the liturgy is a “participation” in the saving works of Christ, our foundational “act” is the “act of faith,” made in acceptance of and knowledge of Christ and in the covenant relationship which he offers to us.
 - ◆ Having faith, we enter more deeply through our openness to a greater share in his saving grace, learning to offer ourselves to Him, cooperating with the grace that is given.
 - ◆ Our “visible” participation (through words, responses, actions) are not for their own sake; these are expressions of the interior disposition of faith, hope, and love that we are both professing and seeking to have increase within us.
 - ◆ Remember Mary: Her initial receptivity, her humble response, her ongoing reflection, and her constant fidelity and obedience both displayed and increased her relationship with God and His Church. So too, our participation (each according to our particular state in life) can testify to and live out such a relationship and lead to its increase.
- Are there still “works” to do? Absolutely. However, our “doing” at the liturgy is always ordered by who we are (that is, our proper state and life that is rooted in our baptism and individually received as distinct members of the Body.)

Let us Enter into His Rest

- Given our survey of the history of this term, an attempt to summarize might see “fully conscious and active participation” as a participation in a relationship with God, centered in receptivity to God and his works for us; not our own efforts. Thus, liturgical participation is meant to be “restful.”
- Words and gestures are an essential part of this rest - as our relationship with God is with our whole being (body and soul.)
- An invitation to rest with these observations - that you might continue to grow more deeply in you fully conscious and active participation in the liturgy in this life, so as to have such participation in the eternal life.

Know the Truth: Read Vatican II’s document yourself: Simply go to www.vatican.va and type in the words “Vatican II Liturgy” in the search box (click on image of magnifying glass in the upper right corner,) and the link to the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy will be the top item on the search.