

## INTRODUCTION

The Lord Jesus Christ used material signs in his earthly ministry – his own body being the pre-eminent sign – to manifest his union with the Father, to reveal his mission to the world, and to make visible to humanity the invisible God. As the incarnate one, he was born of a woman, baptized in a river, fed the hungry with bread and fish, healed the sick and forgave sinners with his touch. He was anointed with oil, shared the Passover meal, suffered torture, was hung on a tree, and buried in the earth. He rose again from the tomb, returned to his followers, and showed them the glorified but tangible body in which he would ascend to heaven, after having commanded them to teach all nations and to baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

In his risen glory, and now seated at the right hand of the Father, the Lord is no longer visible in this world; but as Saint Leo the Great testifies, “What has been visible of our Savior has passed over into the sacraments.” Just as he used signs and words to invite those who heard him in his day to share his personal union with the Father, so today he leads the Church through signs and words in the celebration of the liturgy toward the Kingdom of Heaven, from the visible to the invisible, to see God “face to face.”<sup>2</sup>

“The throne formed by cherubim awaits you, its bearers swift and eager. The bridal chamber is adorned, the banquet is ready, the eternal dwelling places are prepared, the treasure houses of all good things lie open. The kingdom of heaven has been prepared for you from all eternity.”<sup>3</sup>

The Church’s liturgy is an action of the whole Christ: The saints in Christ fully immersed in the heavenly liturgy celebrate it without the use of signs, while we who are on our pilgrim way celebrate the same eternal liturgy in Christ through the signs – the sacraments – which he left to the Church. The sacraments are also actions of the Holy Spirit. They are “the masterworks of God” in the new and everlasting covenant. They are “powers that come forth” from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> BLS 24; cf. CCC 1151. See also the Easter Homily of Saint Melito of Sardis, in *Liturgy of the Hours, Holy Thursday, Office of Readings*. Matthew 28: 19; Luke 24: 13-51.

<sup>2</sup> BLS 25, citing Saint Leo the Great, *Sermons* 74, 2. Another translation would be that he has “passed over into the mysteries.” BLS 26; cf. SC 59; CCC 1075: “Liturgical catechesis aims to initiate people into the mystery of Christ ... by proceeding from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, from the ‘sacraments’ to the ‘mysteries.’” Cf. 1 Corinthians 13: 12. Saint John Chrysostom, *The Priesthood*: “When you see the Lord immolated and lying upon the altar, and the priest bent over that sacrifice praying, and all the people empurpled by that precious blood, can you think that you are still among men and on earth? Or are you not lifted up to heaven?”

<sup>3</sup> From an ancient homily on Holy Saturday, in *Liturgy of the Hours, Holy Saturday, Office of Readings*.

<sup>4</sup> CCC 1139; 1116, citing Luke 5: 17, 6: 19, 8: 46. See also CIC can. 840.

The sacraments are “of the Church” in a double sense: They are “by the Church,” for she is the sacrament of Christ’s action, at work in her through the mission of the Holy Spirit. They are “for the Church” in that “the sacraments make the Church,” since they manifest and communicate, above all in the Eucharist, the mystery of communion with God, who is love, One in three persons.<sup>5</sup>

Through the sacraments, which the Church is “bound to dispense so that the mystery of Christ is communicated under visible signs,” our Lord sanctifies people by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that they become in a unique way true worshipers of God the Father and by which they are inserted into the Church, his Body.<sup>6</sup>

The sacraments are means by which we participate in the Paschal Mystery of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus, they are not mere recollections or commemorations of past events, but are in fact the present actions of Christ in the world and in the lives of Christians. Through the sacraments, the Lord shares his life with us; he calls us to be his disciples, and pours out his own Spirit upon us.

The Church understands herself precisely and fundamentally as a celebrating assembly. As the Church celebrates the sacraments, she also confesses the faith received from the Apostles – whence the ancient saying, *lex orandi, lex credendi* (or *legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*). The law of prayer is the law of faith: The Church believes as she prays. In this sense, it should not be forgotten that if the Church makes the Eucharist, the Eucharist also makes the Church, to the point of becoming the criterion of conformity to the same right doctrine. As Saint Irenaeus reminds us, “Our thought is in full accord with the Eucharist and Eucharist, in its turn, confirms our thought.” The Church’s faith precedes the faith of the believer who is invited to adhere to it, and the liturgy is a constitutive element of the holy and living Tradition that is handed on.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> CCC 1118, citing Saint Augustine, *De civitate Dei* XXII, 17; Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 64, art. 2, ad 3.

<sup>6</sup> CCEO can. 667.

<sup>7</sup> CCC 1124, citing Saint Prosper of Aquitaine, *Capitulum* 8: DS 246. See also idem, *De vocatione omnium gentium* I 12; Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus haereses* IV, 18 5; Pope Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis* (2007) 14: “The Eucharist is Christ who gives himself to us and continually builds us up as his body.... [I]n the striking interplay between the Eucharist which builds up the Church, and the Church herself which ‘makes’ the Eucharist, the primary causality is expressed in the first formula: the Church is able to celebrate and adore the mystery of Christ present in the Eucharist precisely because Christ first gave himself to her in the sacrifice of the Cross. The Church’s ability to ‘make’ the Eucharist is completely rooted in Christ’s self-gift to her.” Cf. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis* (1979) 20; idem, Apostolic Letter *Dominicae cenae* (1980) 4. The connection of liturgy to belief is well illustrated by the *Synodikon* of the Council of Nicea II (787): “As the prophets saw, as the Apostles taught, as the Church received, as the teachers expressed in dogmas, as the world understood, as grace has shone forth, as truth has revealed, as falsehood has been dissolved, as wisdom has made bold to declare, as Christ has assured, thus we declare, thus we assert, thus we preach, honoring Christ our true God and his saints, in words, in writings, in thoughts, in sacrifices, in churches, in holy icons, worshiping and reverencing Christ as God and Lord, and honoring his saints as true

Celebrated worthily and in faith, the sacraments confer the grace that they signify. They are efficacious because in them Christ himself is at work: It is he who baptizes, he who acts in his other sacraments, to communicate the grace that each one signifies. The Father always hears the prayer of his Son's Church who, in the *epiclesis* of each sacrament, expresses her faith in the power of the Spirit. As fire transforms into itself everything it touches, so the Holy Spirit transforms into the divine life whatever is subjected to his power.<sup>8</sup>

This is the meaning of the Church's affirmation that the sacraments act *ex opere operato*, by virtue of the saving work of Christ, accomplished once for all. It follows that "the sacrament is not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or the recipient, but by the power of God." From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts in and through it, independently of the personal holiness of the minister. Nevertheless, the fruits of the sacrament also depend on the disposition of the one who receives it.<sup>9</sup>

The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are necessary for salvation. Sacramental grace is the grace of the Holy Spirit, given by Christ and proper to each sacrament. The Spirit heals and transforms those who receive him by conforming them to the Son of God. The fruit of the sacramental life is that the Spirit of adoption makes the faithful partakers in the divine nature by uniting them in a living union with the only Son, the Savior.<sup>10</sup>

While they are the *means* of grace, the value of the sacraments as *signs* must not be discounted, for they instruct as well as sanctify. The Constitution on the Liturgy says that they "not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it. That is why they are called 'sacraments of faith.' They do,

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servants of the same Lord of all and accordingly offering them veneration. This is the faith of the Apostles; this is the faith of the fathers; this is the faith of the Orthodox; this is the faith which has established the universe."

<sup>8</sup> CCC 1127, citing Council of Trent, Session VII, *Decretum de sacramentis* (1547) cann. 5-6: DS 1605-1606: "If anyone shall say that these sacraments have been instituted for the nourishing of faith alone, let him be anathema." "If anyone shall say that the sacraments of the New Law do not contain the grace which they signify, or that they do not confer that grace on those who do not place an obstacle in the way, as though they were only outward signs of grace or justice, received through faith, and certain marks of the Christian profession by which the faithful among men are distinguished from the unbelievers, let him be anathema."

<sup>9</sup> CCC 1128, citing Council of Trent, Session VII, *Decretum de sacramentis* (1547) can. 8: DS 1608: "If anyone shall say that by the said sacraments of the New Law, grace is not conferred from the work which has been worked [*ex opere operato*], but that faith alone in the divine promise suffices to obtain grace, let him be anathema." See also Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 68, art. 8.

<sup>10</sup> CCC 1129, citing Council of Trent, Session VII, *Decretum de sacramentis* (1547) can. 4: DS 1604: "If anyone shall say that the sacraments of the New Law are not necessary for salvation, but are superfluous, and that, although all are not necessary for every individual, without them or without the desire of them through faith alone men obtain from God the grace of justification, let him be anathema." Cf. 2 Peter 1: 4.

indeed, confer grace, but, in addition, the very act of celebrating them most effectively disposes the faithful to receive this grace to their profit, to worship God duly, and to practice charity."<sup>11</sup>

In recalling the value of the sacraments as signs, the Second Vatican Council echoed what had been said by the Council of Trent, that their celebration enables the *recipients* of God's grace to become *signs* of God's grace as well, both to themselves and to others, just as circumcision had been an external sign of the Old Covenant. "This knowledge will lead them more readily to believe that what the sacraments signify, contain, and effect, is holy and august; and recognizing their sanctity, they will be more disposed to venerate and adore the beneficence of God displayed toward us."<sup>12</sup>

The liturgical rites for the celebration of the sacraments are sacramentals themselves in that they convey grace *ex opere operantis* to those who participate in them, even when they do not receive the sacraments themselves, for the rites "serve to display more fully the effects of the sacraments, placing them, as it were, before our eyes, and to impress more deeply on the minds of the faithful the sanctity of these sacred institutions.... They elevate to sublime contemplation the minds of those who behold and observe them with attention, and excite within them faith and charity."<sup>13</sup>

To the signs and words of Christ, the Church brings elements that speak to the senses: sacred vessels, ritual vestments, musical instruments, candles, bells, flowers, singing, perfumed chrism, incense, blessed oils, holy water, and bread and wine. Architecture, sculpture, paintings, icons, and stained glass provide a setting that speaks of the mystery of God and divine transcendence on the one hand, and the unity of God with the worshiping community on the other. To these we add our own gestures: standing, sitting, kneeling, praying with arms outstretched or with bowed heads, and moving in processions. And so washing and anointing, breaking the bread and sharing the chalice, raising arms in blessing, and imposing hands are the visible signs by which Christ manifests and accomplishes today our sanctification and salvation in the Church. These signs and words dispose us for the heavenly gifts of our crucified and Risen Lord and

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<sup>11</sup> SC 59. See also CIC can. 840.

<sup>12</sup> *Catechism of the Council of Trent (Roman Catechism) II*, Introduction.

<sup>13</sup> *Catechism of the Council of Trent (Roman Catechism) II*, Introduction. See also CCC 1670, citing SC 61: "Sacramentals do not confer the grace of the Holy Spirit in the way that the sacraments do, but by the Church's prayer, they prepare us to receive grace and dispose us to cooperate with it. 'For well-disposed members of the faithful, the liturgy of the sacraments and sacramentals sanctifies almost every event of their lives with the divine grace which flows from the Paschal Mystery of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ. From this source all sacraments and sacramentals draw their power. There is scarcely any proper use of material things which cannot be thus directed toward the sanctification of men and the praise of God.'"

deepen our reverence for the unceasing mercy and grace that come to us in the Church through his passion and death.<sup>14</sup>

Because they are *signs* of as well as *means* to salvation, the sacraments must be celebrated in a liturgically correct, respectful, reverent, and appropriate manner, and the faithful must be educated and prepared not only for their celebration, but also for the response of faith and the spiritual growth that the sacraments bring about.<sup>15</sup>

Every liturgical action, properly so called, is a celebration of the Church and a public act of worship, even if it happens to be celebrated without the participation of the faithful. (Nevertheless, so that the ecclesial nature of each rite may be preserved, the communal form of celebration is to be preferred.)<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> BLS 25; cf. CCC 1148, 1152: "Since Pentecost, it is through the sacramental signs of his Church that the Holy Spirit carries on the work of sanctification. The sacraments of the Church do not abolish but purify and integrate all the richness of the signs and symbols of the cosmos and of social life. Further, they fulfill the types and figures of the Old Covenant, signify and make actively present the salvation wrought by Christ, and prefigure and anticipate the glory of heaven." IALP 41: "The mysteries of Christ are communicated to us through visible signs. The sacraments are, therefore, the place in which created things are assumed in order to give thanks to God and thus reach the fullness of their meaning. The economy of divine grace dispensed to mankind is accomplished by deeds and words (cf. Acts 1: 1), increasing the value of the 'cosmic elements:' the human body above all; then water, oil, bread, and wine; the instruments such as the Eucharistic cup; the sacred building with all that it represents and encloses within it, especially the cross and the holy icons; sacred places and times. Such elements are taken up by the Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit, recapitulated by him and entrusted to the Church as instruments of salvific sacramentality. In fact, the grace of the Holy Spirit makes use of these for the redemption and sanctification of mankind and the cosmos (cf. Romans 8: 16-25) and for rendering the Father worship that is worthy." Cf. CCEO can. 667; CIC can. 840. Idem, 100: "The human person in his or her totality becomes illuminated by God and in the adoption as son attains full relation with him (cf. John 1: 13). God asks us to love him with all our heart, all our soul, and all our strength. No part of the person is excluded, rather every part is integral to the others: soul, spirit, heart, mind and body come together to form the spiritual building raised for the Lord. The person, priest of creation, takes everything into his or her being, giving voice to all inanimate reality for the praise of the Creator. In a particular way, with the Incarnation of the Son of God, humanity is assumed by the Word, and the divine sanctifies and consecrates the universe. Here lies the Christian meaning of the space, gestures, and objects which interact with the believer in divine worship." Tertullian, *De resurrectione carnis* 8, 2-3: "No soul whatever is able to obtain salvation unless it has believed while it was in the flesh. Indeed, the flesh is the hinge of salvation.... The flesh, then, is washed so that the soul may be made clean. The flesh is anointed so that the soul may be dedicated to holiness. The flesh is signed so that the soul may be fortified. The flesh is shaded by the imposition of hands so that the soul may be illuminated by the Spirit. The flesh feeds on the body and blood of Christ so that the soul too may feed on God. They cannot, then, be separated in their reward, when they are united in their works." See also USCCA p. 171.

<sup>15</sup> CIC can. 840: "The sacraments of the New Testament were instituted by Christ the Lord and entrusted to the Church. As actions of Christ and the Church, they are signs and means which express and strengthen the faith, render worship to God, and effect the sanctification of humanity and thus contribute in the greatest way to establish, strengthen, and manifest ecclesiastical communion. Accordingly, in the celebration of the sacraments the sacred ministers and the other members of the Christian faithful must use the greatest veneration and necessary diligence."

<sup>16</sup> AS 149, cf. SC 26-27.

Forming “one mystical person” with Christ the head, the Church acts in the sacraments as “an organically structured priestly community.” Through baptism and confirmation the priestly people is enabled to celebrate the liturgy, while those of the faithful who have received holy orders, are appointed to nourish the Church with the word and grace of God in the name of Christ.<sup>17</sup>

The saving mission entrusted by the Father to his incarnate Son was committed by him, in turn, to the Apostles, and through them to their successors: They receive the Spirit of Jesus to act in his name and in his person. The ordained minister is at the service of the baptismal priesthood, and is the sacramental bond that ties the liturgical action to what the Apostles said and did, and, through them, to the words and actions of Christ, the source and foundation of the sacraments. The ordained priesthood guarantees that it really is Christ who acts in the sacraments through the Holy Spirit, for the Church.<sup>18</sup>

For all these reasons, no liturgical rite may be modified or manipulated at the will of the minister or the community. Even the supreme authority in the Church may not change the liturgy arbitrarily, but only in the obedience of faith and with religious respect for the mystery of the liturgy.<sup>19</sup>



These *Liturgical Norms and Policies*, which supersede the *Sacramental Norms and Policies* promulgated in 1995, address the main liturgical, catechetical, and canonical aspects of each of the sacraments and other rites celebrated in the life of a parish.<sup>20</sup> They are directed to priests, deacons, and other parish leaders, as well as to parents, religious educators, and indeed all the faithful. They are intended to address matters of common interest, while recognizing that the different cultures, traditions, and histories in our parishes and specialized ministries make the Archdiocese of Washington, like the universal Church, a true mosaic of faith.

These norms presume a familiarity with the *praenotanda* and rubrics of the liturgical books, where detailed guidance and instructions regarding the celebration of the sacraments and other rites are to be found. (It should be noted, however, that many of the norms contained in the liturgical books—especially the Sacramentary—have been modified over the years.) Helpful information is found in supplementary documents from the Apostolic See, in the Code of Canon Law, in approved adaptations on the part of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and in the particular law of the Archdiocese. These sources have been consulted in the formulation of these norms and

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<sup>17</sup> CCC 1119, citing LG 11; Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mystici Corporis* (1943).

<sup>18</sup> CCC 1120, citing LG 10, 2; John 20: 21-23; Luke 24: 47; Matthew 28: 18-20.

<sup>19</sup> CCC 1125. See also ADW, *Liturgical Norms and Policies*, 2010, 1.1.6 and its note.

<sup>20</sup> The title has been changed from *Sacramental Norms and Policies* to *Liturgical Norms and Policies* to reflect the broader scope of the revised document.

policies. In fact, much of the text is taken verbatim, or with slight variations for the sake of clarity, from the sources cited in the footnotes.

Every parish that has not done so already is bound to implement these norms and policies, both for the actual celebration of the sacraments and other rites as well as for preparation programs. This is particularly necessary when current parish practices differ from those presented here. If such changes are required, pastors should carefully explain the reasons for them to the faithful.

Within these liturgical norms, references are made to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This is because, like faith and worship, catechesis and liturgy are closely tied. Catechesis (like the liturgy) is as old as the faith itself, and has been formed and reformed over the centuries as circumstances required, though its content—the faith—has remained the same. What Jesus Christ came to teach and what the Church, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for over twenty centuries, has nurtured, applied, and articulated, is the Catholic faith.<sup>21</sup>

Jesus Christ is our Teacher. He offers his people the words of truth and everlasting life. “For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth” (John 18: 37). Today his teaching mission endures in those whom he sends.... The words “You will be my witnesses” echo in the pages of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1: 8) where we find an account of the early Church. In living continuity since those days, the Church has passed on the words—the revelation—that introduces us to Jesus.<sup>22</sup>

Because Jesus, unlike the scribes, taught “as one having authority,” so does the Church. The whole message of faith is a sign of its own truth. For when the words of faith are heard, and reflected on thoughtfully, they are grasped as an astonishingly profound answer to the deepest questions that the heart asks.<sup>23</sup>

Because the *lex credendi* is so closely tied to the *lex orandi*, for our time, and for these liturgical norms, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is “a touchstone for authenticating what was being taught in the name of the Church.” It should also be the foundation for

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<sup>21</sup> CCC 11-12. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, second edition (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, 1997) is also a norm for the production of catechisms by bishops’ conferences, which are meant to apply the teaching of the Church to various countries and cultures, and to the many particular audiences for which catechisms can be designed. In addition to the CCC itself, there is the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Washington: USCCB, 2006), and the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (Washington: USCCB, 2006). See Bishop Donald W. Wuerl, *The Catholic Way, Faith for Living Today* (New York: Doubleday, 2001) 1.

<sup>22</sup> Most Reverend Donald W. Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington, “Catholic Education: Looking to the Future with Confidence,” A Pastoral Letter to the Clergy, Religious and Laity of the Archdiocese of Washington, 14 September 2008.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

the catechetical programs within our parishes, to convey the ancient faith, and to bring its hearers to the altar of heaven.<sup>24</sup>

These norms and policies will be reviewed periodically to ensure that they address the purposes for which they are issued: To deepen our appreciation for the sacraments as the means and signs of our salvation in Christ, and to ensure that we celebrate them and the whole of the liturgy and rites of the Church properly and with fidelity.



The description of the liturgy by the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew I, on the occasion of the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Turkey seems an appropriate way to conclude this section:

Every celebration of the Divine Liturgy is a powerful and inspiring celebration of heaven and of history. Every Divine Liturgy is both an *anamnesis* of the past and an anticipation of the Kingdom. We are convinced that during this Divine Liturgy, we have once again been transferred spiritually in three directions: toward the Kingdom of Heaven where the angels celebrate; toward the celebration of the liturgy through the centuries; and toward the heavenly Kingdom to come.... [O]ur worship coincides with the same joyous worship in heaven and throughout history. Indeed, as Saint John Chrysostom himself affirms: "Those in heaven and those on earth form a single festival, a shared thanksgiving, one choir." Heaven and earth offer one prayer, one feast, and one doxology. The Divine Liturgy is at once the heavenly kingdom and our home, "a new heaven and a new earth," the ground and center where all things find their true meaning.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl, "Why a Catechism for Adults Now?" *Catholic Standard*, 14 September 2006, 5. See also Bishop Donald W. Wuerl, Rev. Ronald Lawler, O.F.M.Cap., Thomas Comerford Lawler, Rev. Kris D. Stubna, eds., *The Teaching of Christ: A Catholic Catechism for Adults*, fifth edition (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2005) 15.

<sup>25</sup> Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, Homily During the Divine Liturgy on the Feast Day of Saint Andrew at the Patriarchal Cathedral of Saint George, Istanbul, 30 November 2006. Cf. Revelation 21: 1.