

Catechism on the Liturgy, I.A

I. Introduction

A few comments on these words are in order:

A. Participation.

1. The word participation is from the Latin: *partis* (part) and *capio* (I take). So what does it mean to partake of the Mass? Here are some good answers from the 1958 Instruction *De Musica Sacra*, from the Congregation of the Rites. Keep in mind that this Instruction is taking is based on a number of previous instructions from Blessed Pius IX, Pius XI, St. Pius X, Benedict XV and Pius XII.

“The Mass of its nature requires that all those present participate in it, in the fashion proper to each. This participation must be primarily interior (i.e., union with Christ the Priest; offering with and through Him). But the participation of those present becomes fuller if to internal attention is joined external participation, expressed, that is to say, by external actions such as the position of the body (genuflecting, standing, sitting) ceremonial gestures (Sign of the Cross), or in particular, the responses prayers and singing...”

“Perfect active participation (*participatio actuosa*), finally, is obtained when there is added sacramental participation (by communion). Deliberate active participation of the faithful is not possible without their adequate instruction.”

a. Notice that the participation is required. This is not referring to the 3rd Commandment directly, but in the sense that if you come, you cannot sit and be an idle or mute spectator and expect the blessing of the Lord, except in very difficult circumstances, such as poor health.

b. The participation is in accord with the fashion proper to each. This means first of all that the role of the altar boy is different than the role of the priest. But it also means that for some, the full attention to the Mass can be impossible, if they are grief-stricken. So there are plenty of exceptions to be made and hairs to be split in these matters. But I'm not going to try to make them all. I'll just speak about the norm. With that being said, the union with Christ the Priest at the altar is especially interior, just like His Mother or St. John standing before Him while He was on the cross. They gave Him their attention, devotion, sympathy, time and everything else they could give Him, but did so silently. That is participation which is primary, and primarily interior. So while praying the Rosary at the Mass is a very low form of participation - and a form which will appeal to very few - Pius XII made it clear that it is not to be condemned.

c. The gestures need to be well made. A sloppy Sign of the Cross, a distracted and irreverent genuflection sets the soul up for poor participation.

d. "...and singing..." I know that trying to move our parish to sing has been like pulling teeth, but I'm not giving up. Several things should help with this, such as our having a hymnal designed just for our parish and having acoustics in the new church building which will be about 1000 percent better. I say that the hymnal will be designed just for us, and there will be more on that later.

e. Some distinctions are in order regarding the Latin phrase *participatio actuosa*. It is often translated as *active* participation, when the translation *actual* participation is more accurate. To understand this, go back to what Our Lord said when He promised "I will be with you all days even unto the end of the world." He lives with us, even though He is at the right hand of the Father. The Church is His mystical body. So when the Church acts, it is the activity of Christ, the Head of the Church. So the teaching, governing and sanctifying of the Church are done

through the hierarchy and the faithful, but when the priest sanctifies through blessing someone, it is really Christ who blesses through the priest. The sacrament which enables us to be part of that activity, that divine life of Christ, is Baptism. A baptized Christian not only has a right to participate in that life, he has a duty to do so.

The baptized can then *actually* participate in the Mass, but the unbaptized can participate only in an *active* way. In other words, the unbaptized can make the Sign of the Cross, and be blessed in doing so, but not in the same way as the baptized.

An example of both is listening. As the scriptures say, *fides ex auditu* – faith comes from hearing. A deacon or a priest is the one reading the Holy Gospel at Mass, but we participate actively and actually by listening attentively. The better we listen, the better we participate. The unbaptized can learn the faith by hearing it; the baptized can worship God with it besides learning.