

## Catechism on the Liturgy I, 7

C.

4. The education of the inner man.

a. One way to look at the pearl of great price, the treasure hidden in the field, that which gives life its meaning, and that which the contemplatives of the Church search for and would not exchange for all the gold in the world is the discovery of the indwelling of God. When we receive Holy Communion, it is the reception of the Holy Trinity in the soul. Thus the greatest benefit of the liturgy (because it is not an end unto itself) is to lead us with a steady hand into the sanctuary of the soul, so that we may grow in the supernatural life.

There are special vocations in the Church who search for God without images. I think of the Desert Fathers, or of the sons of St. Columba or St. Colmille of ancient Ireland. But most of us draw from an immense treasury of signs, words, and ritual actions in order to nourish our meditation.

A taste for mental prayer and for silent prayer is not acquired by a process of reasoning. It is instead the result of a mysterious merging of the soul with the Bride of Christ (the Church). The taste – even the relishing of prayer – depends on our union with the Church and Her way of prayer. Here is what Dom Romain Banquet, a Benedictine Abbot once said to his monks: “Prayer, such as it was understood by St. Benedict, has as its theme the very text of the *Opus Dei* (the work of God, i.e., the Divine Office). It springs up from the womb of this office. Let yourself be caught up in it. God is bowing down to you at this moment. In silence, question the ideas that have been planted in this

way. This kind of interior prayer is the most intimate part of the *Opus Dei* during its celebration; it becomes afterwards its reverberating echo, a precious perfume, a personal fruit suited to the dispositions and needs of each one of us according to the promptings of the Holy Ghost.” (*La Doctrine Monastique*)

Revolutions make more noise; political gatherings, wars, sports events, rock concerts...all human works are more noticeable, like the child in class who won't shut up. But supernatural good makes itself known without noise and hides itself in silence. Once a soul has tasted this supernatural good, the best football game in the world seems to have no more interest to it than a dog barking in the distance.

b. But this is not just true for contemplatives. Lay people can experience it too, if they could give themselves to the liturgy for a time each day. George Bernanos, the superb French novelist, illustrated this well in his life. “Each day he read the newspaper and listened to the radio. However each morning, whatever happened, he set aside half an hour as sacred. Before his family awoke, before the house filled with noise, he would read, in his old, worn missal, the Mass of the day in Latin, with all the concentration of mind and soul he was capable of: this predestined soul had received the divine privilege of attention. He nourished himself avidly with the unchanging formulas of the liturgy, finding in them each morning a note of startling freshness. It was as if, each morning, these

words were being said for the first time in the entire history of the world and to him alone. They were his daily and supersubstantial bread. It was in this way that he started his day. On Sunday he went to Mass with his family and usually received communion.” (*Bernanos Vivant*, by F. Bruckberger)

It would be wonderful if our little church was filled each day with the faithful, but few have the time, energy, money, etc. to do so. Heaven knows that the village with the steeple the tallest structure and the bells the loudest sound seem like a dream any more. But what Bernanos did in his home you can do too. Taste and see. You will find the answer you need to the day’s problem’s in the Mass.

c. This taste for the interior life; this education of the soul takes place also in the liturgical season. Like the light from a star which went extinct thousands of years ago, but is just now shining on us, so the central events of our Lord’s life – His passion, resurrection and ascension, accomplished at a particular point in time, and finished forever at least with regard to their historicity, are conveyed and prolonged by liturgical action. This is what St. Leo the Great meant when he said that that which was visible in the life of our Redeemer has passed into the mysteries.

d. The words *mysteria* and *sacramenta* are synonymous for the Fathers. They describe a sacred action in which the work of our redemption is made present, not just as a symbol, but as something which conveys a great reality. In the 16c men like Martin Lu-

ther were running around stressing the individual and psychological aspects of prayer which was very detrimental to an objective piety centered on the mysteries. One thinks of Luther alone in his cell pouring over the scriptures, and determining what true faith is from the pouring.

But when the liturgy unfolds the scriptures to us, it does not just tell a story likely to favor this or that personal meditation, in which each of us can engage afterwards. Instead, it realizes the actual presence of the Lord, with which we are free to communicate through the length of that act of worship. It is the Church in her entirety – and we with her – taking part in the death and resurrection of our Savior. This is no fruit of the effort of the mind or imagination. It is objective.

e. If we consent to let the liturgy accomplish in us the divine work of redemption (this consent like the Bernanos consented), then as the late Dom Gerard Calvert, OSB put it, “It is then that the judicious choice of scriptural texts and their calm repetition, their power of expression, the art of Gregorian chant, the sacraments and the mysteries of the life of Christ which pass back and forth unceasingly before our eyes, imprint on our souls the image of the Son, who transforms them and reconciles them with the Father.”

For those who wish to accept it, the liturgy offers a remedy for the sadness of our exile and gives us a foretaste of heaven.