

Catechism on the Liturgy I,17

2. Now if the only thing one knew about the Mass was how to perform all its gestures correctly and with devotion, and that the Mass was beautiful in all the meanings of that word, then he would be well on his way to an understanding of God, and of His court, which is heaven. But there is an even higher mode of teaching which the Church employs in the Mass, and it is to put forms into the student who has been polished and formed. This third mode in the art of teaching is *informare*, “to inform.” Literally, it means to sow the imagistic and intelligible seeds of subjects in the bodies and minds of the students, like a farmer seeding corn in his fields. In fact, both (*formare* and *informare*) are called “drilling” which means “piercing through” in Anglo-Saxon. To get technical, Formation is a mode of beauty signifying a form apparent in matter, and Information is an intelligible principle recognized by imagination and intellect through a process analogous to generation, the “conceiving” of images and concepts.

a. It is clear that the poems which the medieval monks composed – which are an important component of the body of Western Chant - are ideal for putting the forms of doctrine into the listeners and singers of it. In other words, if the ordinary man can sing a thought, then he will remember it far longer and better than if he cannot sing it. That is why advertising agencies spend so much time trying to come up with little songs to sell their products.

b. Regarding the songs of the Mass then, Leon Gauthier puts it this way, “Our monks are those theologians whose enthusiasm is not wanting in exactness.” Furthermore, he was able (as any of us can, should we so desire) to distill from their poems what he describes as “an exposition of Catholic doctrine.”

c. Not only the Chant, but the very architecture which is consonant with the Gregorian Rite also informs the believer. “The few capitals from Cluny that have been preserved show, not the chimeras which St. Bernard deprecated, but the Christological symbols for the different tones of the chant. The third tone, for example, like compunction, moves the soul deeply and causes it, as it were, to experience Christ’s Resurrection.” (Leclercq)

d. So by attending Holy Mass devoutly, especially High Mass, one may absorb a great deal of Catholic doctrine just by singing the Propers and the Commons of the feast days, in Gregorian Chant above all, but also in polyphony and hymnody, and if this singing is surrounded by a beautiful church, then together these sacred songs will drill or penetrate (inform) the soul with the melody and sweet truth of God.

e. Another example of informing is the use of Sacred Scripture in the classic Roman Rite. To learn the meaning of Scripture, one must rely on far more than easy vernacular translations. Scripture is accessible to all, certainly, but it is always mysterious, always in need of further study and reflection. Mystery is in the very nature of Scripture, since it is the Word of God, and mysterious things must be heard over and over again. For example, when we use the Rosary correctly we can almost hear the Blessed Mother telling us how important it is to look at the mystery once more. Like any mother who must tell her children over and over again a particular lesson, so that they can finally learn *what* is right and then *do* what is right, the Blessed Mother asks her children regarding the mysteries of the Rosary (and hoping that they will respond in the affirmative), “Do you

want me to tell you the story again about my Son?” Children love to hear the same story over and over. Would that the same would hold true for our attitude towards Sacred Scripture, for one must be like a little child in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. We need to ask to hear the story over and over again.

Here is a fine example by St. Gregory the Great, of how mysterious Sacred Scripture really is.

For as the word of God, by the mysteries which it contains, exercises the understanding of the wise, so usually by what presents itself on the outside, it nurses the simple-minded. It presents in open day that wherewith the little ones may be fed; it keeps in secret that whereby men of a loftier range may be held in suspense of admiration. It is, as it were, a kind of river, if I may so liken it, which is both shallow and deep, wherein both the lamb may find a footing, and the elephant float at large. (Preface to the Commentary on the Book of Job)

So even a small child can be nursed with Sacred Scripture. And again, I hope you don't think they have to hear it dumbed down. To unlock the secrets in the chest of Scripture we shall have to hear it over and over again anyway. *Repetitio est ma-*

ter studiorum. Repetition is the mother of learning. The Church in her wisdom then, proposes to us the Sacred Scriptures in the liturgy, over and over again. She was very wise in not proposing too many texts to us. Several of the Fathers of the Church (such as St. Augustine) thought that it was necessary to hear a single parable forty times before one could begin to really understand it. Thus the repetition of the readings of Scripture at the Mass is the patient teaching of the Mother to the child so that he might learn to become a disciple of her Son.

I should add at this point, that while Erudition, Formation and Information are early modes in the art of teaching, that is not to say that one advanced in age cannot benefit from them. In fact, when a man enters the seminary he might be quite advanced in all good manners and even the virtues. But he will need to be well polished (*erudiebat*) before the first time he must perform the liturgical role of Thurifer. “This is how we hold the thurible up. This is how we incense the people.”

Once the believer has been polished, formed, and informed, he is ready to be educated, which is the fourth mode of teaching.