

POPE LEO XIV

SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM



May 20, 2026

THE LITURGY IN THE MYSTERY OF
THE CHURCH

Dear brothers and sisters, good
morning and welcome!

Today we are beginning a new series
of catechesis on the first Document
issued by the Second Vatican Council:
the Constitution on the sacred liturgy,
Sacrosanctum Concilium (SC).

In drafting this Constitution, the
Council Fathers sought not only to
undertake a reform of the rites, but to
lead the Church to contemplate and
deepen that living bond which
constitutes and unites her: the mystery
of Christ. Indeed, the liturgy touches
the very heart of this mystery:

it is at once the space, the time and
the context in which the Church
receives her very life from Christ. For
in the liturgy, “the work of our
redemption is accomplished” (SC, 2),
which makes us a chosen lineage, a
royal priesthood, a holy nation, a
people whom God has acquired for
Himself (cf. 1 Pet 2:9).

As manifested by the threefold
renewal – biblical, patristic and
liturgical – that the Church underwent
through the course of the twentieth
century, the Mystery in question does
not designate an obscure reality, but
God’s salvific plan, hidden from all
eternity and revealed in Christ,
according to Saint Paul’s affirmation
(cf. Eph 3:2-6). Here, then, is the
Christian Mystery: the Paschal event,
that is to say, the passion, death,

*Each Wednesday,
Pope Leo addresses
those gathered at the
Vatican and, as the
first teacher of the
Church, provides
catechesis about a
topic of his choice. In
May, he began a
walk through of the
Vatican II
documents on the
Liturgy. This is the
first of them.*

resurrection and glorification of Christ, which is made sacramentally present to us precisely in the liturgy, so that every time we take part in the assembly gathered “in his name” (cf. Mt 18:20) we are immersed in this Mystery.

Christ Himself is the inner source of the mystery of the Church, the holy people of God, born from His side pierced on the cross. In the holy liturgy, through the power of His Spirit, He continues to act. He sanctifies and unites the Church, His bride, to His offering to the Father. He exercises His utterly unique priesthood, He who is present in the proclaimed Word, in the sacraments, in the ministers who celebrate, in the gathered community and, in the highest degree, in the Eucharist (cf. SC, 7). Thus, according to Saint Augustine (cf. Sermon, 272), in celebrating the Eucharist the Church receives the Body of the Lord and becomes what she receives: she becomes the Body of Christ, “a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Eph 2:22). This is the “work of our redemption”, which conforms us to Christ and builds us up in communion.

In the holy liturgy, this communion is achieved through “rites and prayers” (SC, 48). The ritual of the Church expresses her faith – in accordance with the familiar saying *lex orandi, lex credendi* – and at the same time shapes ecclesial identity: the proclaimed Word, the celebration of the Sacrament, the gestures, the silences, the space – all this represents and gives form to the people gathered by the Father, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Every celebration thus becomes a true epiphany of the

Church in prayer, as Saint John Paul II recalled (Apostolic Letter Vicesimus quintus annus, 9).

If the liturgy is at the service of the mystery of Christ, one understands why it has been defined as “the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed ... the font from which all her power flows” (SC, 10). It is true that the action of the Church is not limited to the liturgy alone; however, all her activity (preaching, service to the poor, the accompaniment of human realities) converges towards this “summit”. Conversely, the liturgy sustains the faithful by immersing them ever and anew in the Pasch of the Lord and, thus, through the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments and communal prayer, they are refreshed, encouraged and renewed in their commitment to faith and in their mission. In other words,



the participation of the faithful in the liturgical action is at once “internal” and “external”.

This also means that it is called to unfold in a tangible way throughout daily life, in an ethical and spiritual dynamic, so that the liturgy celebrated is translated into life and demands a faithful existence, capable of making concrete what has been

experienced in the celebration: it is in this way that our life becomes a “living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God”, fulfilling our “spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1).

In this way, “the liturgy daily builds up those who are within into a holy temple of the Lord” (SC, 2), and forms an open community, welcoming to all. Indeed, it is inhabited by the Holy Spirit, it introduces us into the life of Christ, it makes us His Body and, in all its dimensions, it represents a sign of the unity of the entire human race in Christ. As Pope Francis said, “the world still does not know it, but everyone is invited to the supper of the wedding of the Lamb (Rev 19:9)”

(Apostolic Letter Desiderio desideravi, 5).

Dear friends, let us allow ourselves to be shaped inwardly by the rites, symbols, gestures and above all the living presence of Christ in the liturgy, which we will have the opportunity to explore in the coming Catechesis.