

Family Life Is A Liturgy? What Does That Even Mean?  
Dr. Greg Popcak

In my last column, I described the “Liturgy of Domestic Church Life,” a model of family spirituality that allows families to experience God, not only when they pray together, but in their relationships, their rituals, and the ways they reach out to others. Before I share how to actually celebrate the Liturgy of Domestic Church Life, I want to share what it means to think of family life as a liturgy.

The word “liturgy” describes the spiritual “work” God does to heal the damage sin does to our relationships. The Liturgy of the Eucharist conquers sin’s power to separate us from God and gives us the grace we need to create communion with others.

The Liturgy of Domestic Church Life enables us to “bring Jesus home” and heal the damage sin does to our families. Here are 5 ways the Christian family is a liturgy.

1. Instituted by God

In “The Spirit of the Liturgy,” Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote, “liturgy includes some kind of ‘institution.’ It cannot spring from our own creativity.” The Eucharist and the ministerial priesthood were *instituted* by Christ on Holy Thursday. The apostles didn’t make it up. Jesus gave these gifts to them and then commissioned them to “do this in memory of me.”

Likewise, as current debates about the family illustrate, the Christian vision of family as one man, one woman and the children they raise together isn’t obvious from a purely human perspective. The Christian vision of “family” wasn’t invented by mankind. It was instituted by God (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2202).

In the Garden, the Father gave Adam and Eve the first Great Commission to “go forth and multiply.” By being born and raised in a family with a mother and father, Jesus conveyed a special dignity to this family arrangement. Finally, by choosing the wedding at Cana to initiate his public ministry, Christ raised marriage and family life to the dignity of a sacrament. The Christian understanding of family is not invented; it is revealed and instituted.

2. A priest presides

You can’t have a liturgy without a priest--or a priest without a liturgy. One can’t exist without the other. That’s why we celebrate Holy Thursday as being the institution of *both* the Eucharist and the ministerial priesthood. The priest consecrates bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.

In a different sense, we are all priests! Through baptism, every Christian is invested in the “common priesthood of the laity.” But again, you can’t be a priest without a liturgy! The Liturgy of Domestic Church Life is what enables us “common priests” to consecrate the world to Christ by living out Christ’s sacrificial love in everything we do at home all day.

### 3. Conveys God's love and blessing

Liturgy conveys God's love and blessing. The Eucharist does this by facilitating the most intimate encounter with God possible this side of heaven.

The Liturgy of Domestic Church Life also conveys God's love and blessing. The Catechism (No. 2205) asserts that the love experienced in the Christian family is meant to model the love that flows from the heart of God himself. That's why the last three popes have referred to the Christian family as an "icon of the Trinity," because it's uniquely equipped to convey and model God's self-giving love to the world.

### 4. Facilitates transformation and healing

Liturgy helps us to heal and to grow into godly people. The Liturgy of the Eucharist draws us into communion with the Lamb of God who takes away our sins. It makes eternal life with God possible. The Liturgy of domestic Church Life also facilitates healing. A healthy Christian family serves as what St. Thomas Aquinas called a "spiritual womb." It is the primary way God raises up, whole and holy disciples of Christ.

### 5. Draws us up into the life of God

Liturgy enables us to participate in the life of God. The Liturgy of the Eucharist gives us God's flesh and blood and actually makes us his "flesh and blood"—so to speak.

By calling the family an "icon of the Trinity," the Church asserts that the Christian family helps us experience the inner-life of God. An icon isn't just a picture. *It's a portal* that invites us to participate in a spiritual mystery. The Liturgy of Domestic Church Life enables Christian families to participate in the love that exists between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit — the love each of us was created to long for and emulate.

The Christian family isn't just a collection of individuals living under the same roof. It is a liturgy that enables the common priesthood to consecrate the world to Christ.

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