

Pastor's Message

Our liturgy committee has decided to spend this year better educating ourselves and our community about the Mass. I have been asked to use my Pastor's Message during the ordinary time of our liturgical year to discuss the structure and theology behind what we do when we gather to pray the Eucharist. I am happy to do so.

The first thing that should be said is that our Church has a rich and deep tradition when it comes to celebrate the Mass. There are many documents, letters from Popes and Bishops, missals, lectionaries and rule books for how to best celebrate the Mass. I will try to describe and clarify some of those resources as I discuss how and why we do what we do at Mass. But the document (it's called a "constitution" in Latin) that drives everything we do at Mass in the current age is *Sacrosanctum Concilium* overwhelmingly passed by the council fathers and promulgated by Pope Paul VI on December 4, 1963. We have been praying this Mass for over 50 years now. Arguably this constitution had the greatest affect on the church, more than any other from the Second Vatican council, because it affected how we pray publicly. For those of us who remember how we celebrated Mass before Vatican II (in Latin with the priest facing the wall not the people and with very little laity participation), the changes in the Mass unfortunately created a lot of animosity, confusion, and misunderstanding in the early days after the council. We are still trying to explain and understand why the Church changed the way we pray the Mass and how best to pray our beautiful Catholic Eucharistic liturgy.

But I want to start with a quote from *Sacrosanctum Concilium* that many, myself included, believe must always guide all that we do at our public prayer. The constitution states:

Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to fully conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people (1Pt.2:9; cf. 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.

This quote has come to be the central, guiding principle for all those who study and work for good liturgy in our Church: every Catholic has the right and the duty to participate fully, actively and consciously in the sacred liturgy. Hopefully these weekly messages during ordinary time will help us all more fully, consciously and actively participate in the Mass. In these messages I will explain why the changes were made and how the Church wants us to participate so that our prayer is beautiful, effective, and gives praise and glory to God. If you have questions about the Mass I urge you to call or send them in to the parish and I will address them in these messages.

Our liturgy at St. Matthew's is some of the best liturgy in which I have ever had the privilege to celebrate. St. Matthew's celebrates Mass very meaningfully and elegantly by good proclamation of the Word of God, by graceful and reverent actions, and by beautiful and moving music, but we can always do better. The constitution on the sacred liturgy states that the Eucharist is *the center of the Christian community, ...the source of the Christian life, ...and the center and culmination of the entire life of the Christian community.* The Mass is meant to be the heart of our faith and of our life; the source from which our lives get sustenance purpose and meaning and the summit to which we bring all that we are and do. May these reflections help us celebrate ever better the presence of Jesus Christ among us.

Fr. Chris