

LITURGY PODCASTS

3	The Liturgy	The broader context of the worship of God, in which the Mass is the summit; purpose of man's life.
5	Old Testament Worship	The roots of the worship of the true God. Melchizedek and OT types. Temple worship. The psalms.

EPISODE 3: LITURGY

Introduction

Context: the Mass is the summit of the Church's liturgy. What is liturgy?

My plan is to treat the subject chronologically: the term « liturgy » as used by pagan authors and in the Greek Septuagint : its use in the Church Fathers and early ecumenical councils : the discussion of the rites and ceremonies of the Church found in St. Thomas Aquinas, the Council of Trent, the SRC (Sacred Congregation of Rites, founded by Pope Sixtus V in 1588) ; and finally the document of Pius XII on the Sacred Liturgy, *Mediator Dei*.

Nominal definitions : liturgy, ceremonies, rites

Liturgy derives from:

- Greek λειτουργία meaning public service
- Which itself derives from λήϊτα ἔργα, public works,
- from λαός, the people, and ἔργον, work.

Aristotle in his *Politics* speaks of « αἱ πρὸς τοὺς θεοὺς λειτουργίαι, » public service to the gods.

- The pagan Greeks considered their worship of the gods to be a kind of *service*, since in their pagan mythology the gods are thirsty for sacrifice. Ritual worship gives them something that they otherwise lack.

- This pagan understanding of sacrifice is explicitly rejected by the God of Israel, e.g., in Psalm 49:
 - 49:9 I will not take calves out of thy house: nor he goats out of thy flocks.
 - 49:10 For all the beasts of the woods are mine: the cattle on the hills, and the oxen.
 - 49:11 I know all the fowls of the air: and with me is the beauty of the field.
 - 49:12 If I should be hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof.
 - 49:13 Shall I eat the flesh of bullocks? or shall I drink the blood of goats?
 - 49:14 Offer to God the sacrifice of praise: and pay thy vows to the most High.

Nevertheless, the term itself λειτουργία or public service (and its related verb λειτουργεῖν) becomes a technical term referring to the public worship of the gods, primarily through ritual sacrifice, performed by someone who is duly authorized to act in the name of civil society.

As such, the term was accepted and employed by the Jews who translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek (the Septuagint, composed in Alexandria in the last several centuries before the birth of Christ).

The word liturgy does not appear in the Douay-Rheims, the Vulgate, or other Bibles based upon the Hebrew Masoretic text ; there is no exact equivalence between the Septuagint text and the parallel passages in Hebrew.

- Thus for example Exodus 30:18-20 has : « Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and feet in (the brazen laver) when they are going into the tabernacle of the testimony, and when they are to come to the altar, to offer on it incense to the Lord... » ; whereas the Septuagint has: ...when they will go in to the altar, to « liturgate » (λειτουργεῖν) and to offer holocausts to the Lord.¹

In the Eastern Church the λειτουργία comes into general usage in the 4th century as a synonym for the Mass.

By the second council of Nicea (787 AD) λειτουργία is used in its modern sense, as referring to Church services in general. But the term has not yet been transcribed into the Latin language ; the word employed in the Latin translation of the Council text is *ministerium*, ministry.

¹ ὅταν προσπορεύωνται πρὸς τὸ θυσιαστήριον λειτουργεῖν καὶ ἀναφέρειν τὰ ὀλοκαυτώματα κυρίω,

The term liturgy seems to have been ignored in the Western church. We find neither the noun *liturgia* nor the adjective *liturgicus* in St. Jerome's Latin translation of the Bible (as already mentioned; the word occurs nowhere in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas; nor even in the council of Trent.

According to Dom Cyprien Vagaggini (*Il senso teologico della Liturgia*, The Theological Sense of the Liturgy), the word « liturgy » was re-introduced into our Western vocabulary by the humanists and liturgists of the 17th century. Ancient authors speak rather of « divine ministry, ecclesiastical ministry, divine offices » (*ministerium divinum, ministerium ecclesiasticum, officia divina*).

This makes it rather difficult to study the liturgy in ancient Western sources. There is no fixed term that refers to the ensemble of rites and ceremonies that we call « liturgy » today.

St. Thomas: etymology of « ceremony »

St. Thomas treats of the liturgy incidentally in speaking of the *rites* and *ceremonies* used in the celebration of the Mass and the administration of the sacraments.

In his commentary on the Sentences (IV, D. 1, Q. 1, A. 5, ad quaestiuncula 3) he gives the etymology of the word ceremony: « Those things are called ceremonies which do not have any obvious reason for the way in which they are done (*non habent causam manifestam ipsorum factorum*), although they may have an obvious reason for their institution (*quamvis possint habere causam manifestam suae institutionis*).

[On this obscurity of ceremonial actions, see the passage of Origen later on.]

They are called ceremonies, being as it were the offices of Ceres (the Pagan goddess of the harvest, whence « cereal » in English); she was the goddess of grains; and this is because sacrifices were first offered to her, and later on the name used to refer to these sacrifices was applied to the worship of the gods in general. »

St. Thomas does not give an etymology for the word « rite » (Latin *ritus*) and even the modern dictionaries are ignorant of its origin. But the word seems to accentuate the legal aspect of religious ceremony: a rite is a religious ceremony performed in accordance with ritual laws, laws that determine the correct manner of doing things. In Latin the adverb « rite » means « in the manner or form prescribed by law » (cf. the Lewis and Short Latin-English dictionary).

St. Thomas: theology of liturgy

(1) The members of the Church are deputed in different ways to liturgical worship by the sacramental characters of baptism, confirmation and holy Orders, which, each of them, give a participation in the priesthood of Christ, albeit differently:

ST III Q.63 A.3:

« The faithful are deputed to a twofold end. First and principally to the enjoyment of glory. Secondly, each of the faithful is deputed to receive, or to bestow on others, things pertaining to the worship of God (*ea quae pertinent ad cultum Dei*). And this, properly speaking, is the purpose of the sacramental character.

« Now the whole rite of the Christian religion is derived from Christ's priesthood. Consequently, it is clear that the sacramental character is specially the character of Christ, to Whose character the faithful are likened by reason of the sacramental characters, which are nothing else than certain participations of Christ's Priesthood, flowing from Christ Himself. »

(2) The heart of liturgical worship is the virtue of religion, annexed to the cardinal virtue of justice, and which inclines us to render to God the worship due to him. Religion has as its internal acts devotion and prayer; as its external acts, adoration and sacrifice.

ST II-II Q. 84 A.1:

« Natural reason tells man that he is subject to a higher being, on account of the defects which he perceives in himself, and in which he needs help and direction from someone above him: and whatever this superior being may be, it is known to all under the name of God. Now just as in natural things the lower are naturally subject to the higher, so too it is a dictate of natural reason in accordance with man's natural inclination that he should tender submission and honor, according to his mode, to that which is above man. Now the mode befitting to man is that he should employ sensible signs in order to signify anything, because he derives his knowledge from sensible (i.e., sense-perceptible) things. »

(3) St. Thomas explains the meaning of *adoration*:

ST II-II Q. 84 A.2 corpus and ad 2:

« Exterior adoration is offered on account of interior adoration; in other words, we exhibit signs of humility in our bodies in order to incite our affections to submit to God, since it is connatural to us to proceed from the sensible to the intelligible... Just as prayer is primarily in the mind, and secondarily expressed in words, as stated above, so too adoration consists chiefly in an interior reverence of God, but secondarily in certain bodily signs of humility; thus when we genuflect we signify our weakness in comparison with God, and when we prostrate ourselves we profess that we are nothing of ourselves. »

—and elsewhere he comments:

ST II-II Q. 93 A.1:

«Just as a thing is signified by word, so it is by deed: and it is in this signification by deed (i.e., ritual gestures) that the outward worship of religion consists. »

(4) He explains the meaning of *sacrifice*:

ST II-II Q. 85 A.1:

« It is a dictate of natural reason that man should use certain sense-perceptible things, by offering them to God in sign of the subjection and honor due to Him, like those who make certain offerings to their lord in recognition of his authority. Now this is what we mean by sacrifice. »

To this, he adds several helpful precisions:

ST II-II Q. 85 A.3:

Ad 2 (*speaking of sacrifice in a broad sense*): « Man's good is threefold. There is first his soul's good which is offered to God in a certain inward sacrifice by devotion, prayer and other like interior acts: and this is the principal sacrifice. The second is his body's good, which is, so to speak, offered to God in martyrdom, and abstinence or continency. The third is the good which consists of external things: and of these we offer a sacrifice to God, directly when we offer our possession to God immediately, and indirectly when we share them with our neighbor for God's sake. »

Ad 3 (*now speaking of sacrifice in the proper sense*): « A *sacrifice*, properly speaking, requires that something be done to the thing which is offered to God, for instance animals were slain and burnt, the bread is broken, eaten, blessed. The very word signifies this, since sacrifice is so called because a man does something sacred [*facit sacrum*].

« On the other hand an *oblation* is properly the offering of something to God even if nothing be done thereto, thus we speak of offering money or bread at the altar, and yet nothing is done to them. Hence every sacrifice is an oblation, but not conversely.

« *Tithes*, however, are neither a sacrifice nor an oblation, properly speaking, because they are not offered immediately to God, but to the ministers of Divine worship. »

(5) St. Thomas explains the importance of obeying liturgical law in his article on superstition, or excess in outward worship:

ST II-II Q. 93 A.1:

« A worshipper can be guilty of falsehood in outward worship, especially in the common worship which ministers offer in the person of the whole Church. For even as he would be guilty of falsehood who, in the name of another person, proffered things that are not committed to him, so too does a man incur the guilt of falsehood who, in the name of the Church, gives worship to God contrary to the manner established by the Church making use of her divine authority, and contrary to ecclesiastical custom. »

Trent

The Council of Trent teaches, in section 22 (on the Mass), chapter 5:

« Since the nature of man is such that he cannot without external means be raised easily to meditation on divine things, holy mother Church has instituted certain *rites*, namely, that some things in the mass be pronounced in a low tone and others in a louder tone. She has likewise, in accordance with apostolic discipline and tradition, made use of *ceremonies*, such as mystical blessings, lights, incense, vestments, and many other things of this kind, whereby both the majesty of so great a sacrifice might be emphasized and the minds of the faithful excited by those visible signs of religion and piety to the contemplation of those most sublime things which are hidden in this sacrifice. »

Sacred congregation of *Rites*.

In 1588 (Jan. 22) Pope Sixtus V issues an Apostolic Constitution *Immensa Aeterni Dei* erecting for the first time Roman congregations with well-defined spheres of competency and delegated powers. (Beforehand, the congregations of cardinals were created *ad hoc* to deal with specific issues and would subsequently submit their reports to the general consistory of cardinals that was summoned weekly to advise the Pope on grave matters; there were no permanent congregations, aside from the Roman inquisition.)

The first congregation was that of the Holy Inquisition, already in existence, but which is confirmed in its powers:

« First of all, because faith, without which it is impossible to please God, is the foundation of the whole spiritual edifice, We, desirous to protect whole and inviolate against all the assaults of hell this precious deposit which has been entrusted to Us above all by Christ the Lord in the person of Blessed Peter ... likewise confirm and establish the congregation of the Holy Inquisition into heretical depravity... »

Then in fifth place comes the Congregation for Sacred Rites and Ceremonies:

« Now however, since the sacred rites and ceremonies that the Church, guided by the Holy Ghost, and following apostolic tradition and discipline, employs in the administration of the sacraments, in the divine offices and in every act of veneration of God and of the saints, are an abundant source of edification for the Christian people, constitute a profession of the true Faith, inspire a sense of the majesty of sacred things, raise up the minds of the faithful to the contemplation of the loftiest realities, and kindle in them the fire of devotion; We, wishing to further increase the piety of the Church's children and to both preserve and renew the sacred rites and ceremonies used in divine worship, have likewise chosen five cardinals, who will be specially responsible for ensuring that the ancient sacred rites be diligently observed by all persons and in all places whatsoever, in all churches of the city of Rome (including Our own pontifical chapel) and of the whole world, in the celebration of the Mass, in the divine offices, in the administration of the sacraments, and in all other things pertaining to the worship of God. If any ceremonies have become obsolete, let the Cardinals restore them; let them reform, and if necessary, correct the books of sacred rites and ceremonies, and in the first place the Pontifical, the Ritual, the Ceremonial (of Bishops); let them examine the divine offices for patron saints, and, having consulted Us, let them authorize the same. »

- Note the circumlocution, « books of sacred rites and ceremonies » (*libros de sacris ritibus et caeremoniis*)
- The much simpler expression « liturgical books » (*libros liturgicos*) has not yet appeared in Church legislation. The first use of the term in magisterial documents (that I could find) was during the pontificate of Clement XII, AD 1732 (cf. *Bullarium Romanum*, vol. 21[?]).

Mediator Dei

This encyclical seems to be the first published by a Pope which directly addresses the subject of the Church's liturgy. In it Pius XII encourages the genuine liturgical movement begun by figures such as Pius X and Dom Gueranger while warning against certain aberrations (which would later result in the New Mass).

Here I cite only the paragraphs which serve to illustrate the nature and importance of the liturgy; the polemical aspects, condemnation of errors, etc., will be treated in later podcasts.

PARTS OF THE LITURGY

« 3. ...The Church prolongs the priestly mission of Jesus Christ mainly by means of the sacred liturgy.

- She does this in the first place at the *altar*, where constantly the sacrifice of the cross is represented and with a single difference in the manner of its offering, renewed.

- She does it next by means of the *sacraments*, those special channels through which men are made partakers in the supernatural life.
- She does it, finally, by offering to God, all Good and Great, the daily tribute of her *prayer of praise*...

ROLE OF CHRIST IN THE LITURGY

20. ...Along with the Church, therefore, her Divine Founder is present at every liturgical function:

- Christ is present at the august sacrifice of the altar both in the person of His minister and above all under the eucharistic species.
- He is present in the sacraments, infusing into them the power which makes them ready instruments of sanctification.
- He is present, finally, in prayer of praise and petition we direct to God, as it is written: « Where there are two or three gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them. » [22]

DEFINITION OF THE LITURGY

The sacred liturgy is, consequently,

- the public worship which our Redeemer as Head of the Church renders to the Father,
- as well as the worship which the community of the faithful renders to its Founder, and through Him to the heavenly Father.

It is, in short, the worship rendered by the Mystical Body of Christ in the entirety of its Head and members.

PURPOSE OF THE LITURGY

21. ...Whenever their pastors can summon a little group of the faithful together, they (the first Christians):

- set up an altar on which they proceed to offer the sacrifice,
- and around which are ranged all the other rites appropriate for the saving of souls and for the honor due to God.

Among these latter rites,

- the first place is reserved for the sacraments, namely, the seven principal founts of salvation.
- There follows the celebration of the divine praises in which the faithful also join, obeying the behest of the Apostle Paul, « In all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one

another in psalms, hymns and spiritual canticles, singing in grace in your hearts to God.

»

- Next comes the reading of the Law, the prophets, the gospel and the apostolic epistles;
- and last of all the homily or sermon in which the official head of the congregation recalls and explains the practical bearing of the commandments of the divine Master and the chief events of His life, combining instruction with appropriate exhortation and illustration of the benefit of all his listeners.

(In other words: the **LATREUTIC** aspect: worship God by (1) sacrifice [*the Mass*], (2) adoration and praise [*the sacred rites, the divine office*]: and the **SALVIFIC** aspect: sanctification of the faithful by (1) propitiation and impetration [*the Mass, which removes obstacles and disposes God to give grace*] and (2) by the communication of graces *ex opere operato* [*the sacraments, instruments of Christ for giving grace*] and *ex opere operantis Ecclesiae* [*the sacramentals, or items blessed through the intercession of the Church, and the prayer of the Church*] and finally (3) by instruction [*the readings, the sermon, even the rites as signs signifying sacred realities*])

(Or as Pius X puts it in *Tra le Sollecitudini*: « the general purpose of the liturgy... is (1) the glory of God and (2) the sanctification and (3) edification of the faithful.)

WORSHIP: EXTERIOR AND SOCIAL ASPECT

23. The worship rendered by the Church to God must be, in its entirety, interior as well as exterior.

- It is exterior because the nature of man as a composite of body and soul requires it to be so.
- Likewise, because divine Providence has disposed that « while we recognize God visibly, we may be drawn by Him to love of things unseen. »
- Every impulse of the human heart, besides, expresses itself naturally through the senses; and the worship of God, being the concern not merely of individuals but of the whole community of mankind, must therefore be social as well. This obviously it cannot be unless religious activity is also organized and manifested outwardly.
- Exterior worship, finally, reveals and emphasizes the unity of the mystical Body, feeds new fuel to its holy zeal, fortifies its energy, intensifies its action day by day...

INTERNAL ASPECT

24. But the chief element of divine worship must be interior... Otherwise religion clearly amounts to mere formalism, without meaning and without content...

25. It is an error, consequently, and a mistake to think of the sacred liturgy as merely the outward or visible part of divine worship or as an ornamental ceremonial. No less erroneous

is the notion that it consists solely in a list of laws and prescriptions according to which the ecclesiastical hierarchy orders the sacred rites to be performed.

EFFICACY OF THE LITURGY

26. It should be clear to all, then, that... the worship rendered to God by the Church in union with her divine Head is the most efficacious means of achieving sanctity.

- 27. This efficacy, where there is question of the eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments, derives first of all and principally from the act itself (*ex opere operato*).
- But if one considers the part which the Immaculate Spouse of Jesus Christ takes in the action, embellishing the sacrifice and sacraments with prayer and sacred ceremonies, or if one refers to the « sacramentals » and the other rites instituted by the hierarchy of the Church, then its effectiveness is due rather to the action of the church (*ex opere operantis Ecclesiae*), inasmuch as she is holy and acts always in closest union with her Head.

DIVINE AND HUMAN ELEMENTS: DIVERSITY AND MUTABILITY

50. The sacred liturgy does, in fact, include divine as well as human elements. The former, instituted as they have been by God, cannot be changed in any way by men.

But the human components admit of various modifications, as the needs of the age, circumstance and the good of souls may require, and as the ecclesiastical hierarchy, under guidance of the Holy Spirit, may have authorized.

- This will explain the marvelous variety of Eastern and Western rites.
- Here is the reason for the gradual addition, through successive development, of particular religious customs and practices of piety only faintly discernible in earlier times.
- Hence likewise it happens from time to time that certain devotions long since forgotten are revived and practiced anew.

All these developments attest the abiding life of the immaculate Spouse of Jesus Christ through these many centuries. They are the sacred language she uses, as the ages run their course, to profess to her divine Spouse her own faith along with that of the nations committed to her charge, and her own unflinching love.

THE DIVINE OFFICE

142. The divine office is the prayer of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, offered to God in the name and on behalf of all Christians, when recited by priests and other ministers of the Church and by religious who are deputed by the Church for this.

144. By assuming human nature, the Divine Word introduced into this earthly exile a hymn which is sung in heaven for all eternity. He unites to Himself the whole human race and with it sings this hymn to the praise of God.

THE LITURGY, CENTER OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

80. ...all the faithful should be aware that to participate in the eucharistic sacrifice is their chief duty and supreme dignity...

201. ...The Mass is the chief act of divine worship; it should also be the source and center of Christian piety.

98. In order that the oblation by which the faithful offer the divine Victim in this sacrifice to the heavenly Father may have its full effect, it is necessary that the people add something else, namely, the offering of themselves as a victim.

102. All the elements of the liturgy, then, would have us reproduce in our hearts the likeness of the divine Redeemer through the mystery of the cross, according to the words of the Apostle of the Gentiles, "With Christ I am nailed to the cross. I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me." [95] Thus we become a victim, as it were, along with Christ to increase the glory of the eternal Father.

IMPORTANCE OF PRIVATE DEVOTIONS

173. When dealing with genuine and solid piety We stated that there could be no real opposition between the sacred liturgy and other religious practices... In fact, there are certain exercises of piety which the Church recommends very much to clergy and religious.

174. It is Our wish also that the faithful, as well, should take part in these practices. The chief of these are:

- meditation on spiritual things,
- diligent examination of conscience,
- enclosed retreats,
- visits to the blessed sacrament, and
- those special prayers in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary among which the rosary, as all know, has pride of place.

175. From these multiple forms of piety, the inspiration and action of the Holy Spirit cannot be absent... Besides, since they develop a deeper spiritual life of the faithful, they prepare them to take part in sacred public functions with greater fruit, and they lessen the danger of liturgical prayers becoming an empty ritualism.

UNDERSTANDING OF THE CEREMONIES

197. ...Whatever pertains to external worship has assuredly its importance; however, the most pressing duty of Christians is to live the liturgical life, and increase and cherish its supernatural spirit.

198. Readily provide the young clerical student with facilities to understand the sacred ceremonies, to appreciate their majesty and beauty...

105. Therefore, they are to be praised who, with the idea of getting the Christian people to take part more easily and more fruitfully in the Mass, strive to make them familiar with the « Roman Missal, » so that the faithful, united with the priest, may pray together in the very words and sentiments of the Church.

108. Many of the faithful are unable to use the Roman missal even though it is written in the vernacular; nor are all capable of understanding correctly the liturgical rites and formulas... they can adopt some other method which proves easier for certain people; for instance, they can lovingly meditate on the mysteries of Jesus Christ or perform other exercises of piety or recite prayers which, though they differ from the sacred rites, are still essentially in harmony with them.

The obscurity of liturgical ceremonies

How are we to understand the obscurity of liturgical ceremonies?

1. INSTITUTION VS. USE

Let's recall what St. Thomas said: « Those things are called ceremonies which do not have any obvious reason for the way in which they are done (*non habent causam manifestam ipsorum factorum*), although they may have an obvious reason for their institution. »

Often there is a practical reason attached to the institution of a liturgical vestment, prayer or gesture which over time becomes obsolete, but the liturgical element itself remains and is endowed with a mystical signification.

For example, the **amice** originally came into use to keep the minister's vocal cords warm in cold climates so that he could chant well. It also serves monks as an extension of their alb to cover the hood of their habit, which they wear over their head in procession. Neither of these purposes hold good for the everyday use of the amice by a priest. But the amice remains in use and is regarded as the « helmet of salvation » spoken of by Isaias (ch. 59) and St. Paul (Eph. 3).

The **maniple** originally served to as a kind of handkerchief draped over the minister's arm to wipe sweat off his brow. It's no longer used that way, but it remains the *manipulum fletus et doloris*: the sheaf of weeping and sorrow, referring to the painful (and sweaty) work of cultivating the fields, terminating in the joy of the harvest (cf. Ps. 125).

The **chasuble** used to be a circular garment with a hole in the middle for the celebrant's head; like the virtue of charity, which gives to all the other virtues their meritorious value, the chasuble covered the entirety of the minister's body, including all the other liturgical vestments (which represent the other virtues). The chasuble was very heavy and voluminous; hence the need for the other ministers to sustain it, especially at the elevation of the host and chalice. Chasubles are no longer so heavy and cumbersome; but we continue to lift the back of the chasuble at the elevation.

The **paten** used to be much larger, since originally there was only one very large host which would be broken into as many pieces as were necessary for the congregation; the preparation of small hosts for the faithful in a separate vessel or ciborium had not yet become customary. Hence during that part of the mass when the host would lie directly on the corporal and the paten was not needed, rather than putting it aside on the altar (where it would be cumbersome because of its size), it was more fitting that it be carried by a sacred minister until it should be needed again. Hence the practice of the subdeacon holding the paten during the Offertory and Canon. Even when patens became much smaller (and could easily remain on the altar), the practice continued: the subdeacon represents the Jews, and the veiled paten held before his eyes represents their blindness to the mystery of Christ.

2. CONNATURAL SIGNS

First of all, we must realise that gestures *are* apt to represent things, even if we do not have a clear and conscious knowledge of what is being represented. As St. Thomas says, «Just as a thing is signified by word, so it is by deed: and it is in this signification by deed (i.e., ritual gestures) that the outward worship of religion consists. »

We often « get » what is being represented even if we wouldn't know how to explain it. Bows, genuflections, the folding of the hands in prayer, the use of incense... we might not know the historical context in which these gestures emerged (for example, the folded hands of the vassal being placed between those of his liege lord to promise obedience), but this is not strictly necessary, because these bodily attitudes and gestures are *connatural*; we have recognize instinctively that doing them helps us to pray, even if we don't know why.

3. HIDING AND REVEALING

The symbolism of liturgical gestures is kind of like the **parables** of Our Lord: rather than teach a lesson directly, He chose to convey the same lesson through a story or an image: for example, « the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net cast into the sea and gathering up all kinds of fish both good and bad... »

The veiling of the moral or doctrinal lesson under parabolic imagery paradoxically renders the lesson at once obscure and at the same time more accessible. The imagery sticks in the mind; even if it is not understood at once, it remains in the memory and will be little by little digested. Whereas if the lesson is given directly, it is either not understood at all, or else it is understood in a superficial manner and then quickly forgotten.

Likewise, the lessons taught by liturgical ritual are not immediately accessible to all, but they leave a lasting impression and little by little are absorbed in a much more profound and lasting way than if the same truths were simply stated in a direct and explicit fashion.

4. THE SACRED MUST BE VEILED

Origen, one of the early Church Fathers, has fascinating things to say on this topic. In Homily 5 on the Book of Numbers, he comments on the following passage:

4:15 When Aaron and his sons have wrapped up the sanctuary and the vessels thereof at the removing of the camp, then shall the sons of Caath enter in to carry the things wrapped up: and they shall not touch the vessels of the sanctuary, lest they die...

4:18 Destroy not the people of Caath from the midst of the Levites:

4:19 But do this to them, that they may live, and not die, by touching the holies of holies. Aaron and his sons shall go in, and they shall appoint every man his work, and shall divide the burdens that every man is to carry.

4:20 Let not others by any curiosity see the things that are in the sanctuary before they be wrapped up, otherwise they shall die.

In other words, the sons of Cath, who were Levites not of the line of Aaron, did not have the right to see the vessels of the sanctuary, and especially of the holy of holies. Only the priests, and in the latter case only the high priest had the right to see and to touch such things. Therefore they were wrapped up in cloths by the priests so that the Levites could then carry them without directly seeing or touching them.

Origen comments:

« When those who have been instructed in mystical doctrine, and who have become perfect teachers, lay burdens upon the people, and the people does and fulfills what is commanded of them, without however understanding the reason for what they do: what else are they doing, if not carrying the Holy of Holies on their shoulders, wrapped up however and covered?

« And so that what we say may become even more obvious, we will provide you with examples from the divine books. Moses without a doubt understood what was the true circumcision, what was the true Paschal celebration, what was the true feast of the new moon, and what was the true Sabbath day; and whereas he understood all these things in their spiritual signification, he nevertheless wrapped them up verbally through bodily images and foreshadowings; and whereas he knew that the true Paschal lamb to be immolated was Christ, he ordains that a bodily lamb (the animal) be immolated for the Paschal celebration...

« But likewise in the ceremonies that we observe in the Church there are not a few things that all are required to do, but whose meaning is not evident to all. For example, the fact that we bend the knees to pray, and that, out of all the directions we might pray in, we turn toward the east; this I do not believe is easy for just anyone to understand. Or again, who will find it easy to explain the reason for the manner of receiving the Eucharist, or the rite surrounding its use, or again the rites observed in baptism: the words, the gestures, the order of questions and answers? And nevertheless we bear all these things wrapped up and covered on our shoulders: since we fulfill and carry out these things, just as we have received them, handed down and entrusted to us by our high Priest and his sons.

« When, therefore, we carry out these and other such things, without however understanding the reasons for them, we lift up on our shoulders and carry the divine mysteries all covered up and concealed, unless there be among us an Aaron or a son of Aaron, to whom it is granted to see such things bare and unveiled.

« And even they realize that this understanding is granted to them in such a way that they are yet obliged to veil and cover the same mysteries whensoever they find it necessary to give and enjoin their celebration on others. »

EPISODE 5: OT WORSHIP

Mediator Dei: « We observe that when God institutes the Old Law, He makes provision besides for sacred rites, and determines in exact detail the rules to be observed by His people in rendering Him the worship He ordains. To this end He established various kinds of sacrifice and designated the ceremonies with which they were to be offered to Him. His enactments on all matters relating to the Ark of the Covenant, the Temple and the holy days are minute and clear. He established a sacerdotal tribe with its high priest, selected and described the vestments with which the sacred ministers were to be clothed, and every function in any way pertaining to divine worship.[11] Yet this was nothing more than a faint foreshadowing [12] of the worship which the High Priest of the New Testament was to render to the Father in heaven. »