



Episode 8: Purpose of the Mass

SUMMARY

In everything we do in life, it is essential to understand the goal or purpose, if we want to participate in a fruitful manner. In the Catholic Mass, the goal of our worship is quite clearly directed at the praise of God and the sanctification of the world. In fact, the Church puts these very words on the lips of her ministers and faithful at every celebration of the Eucharist:

Priest: Pray, brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the Almighty Father.

People: May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands, for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church.

Some mistakenly believe that the goal of Mass is to develop community. We must be clear, however, that while the tradition teaches that the greatest manifestation of the church is at Mass celebrated by the bishop with his priests, deacons and all the faithful, this community, in

fact, is a by-product of the authentic worship of God and care for neighbor.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

The liturgy in its turn moves the faithful, filled with “the paschal sacraments,” to be “one in holiness”; it prays that “they may hold fast in their lives to what they have grasped by their faith”; the renewal in the Eucharist of the covenant between the Lord and man draws the faithful into the compelling love of Christ and sets them on fire. From the liturgy, therefore, and especially from the Eucharist, as from a font, grace is poured forth upon us; and the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God, to which all other activities of the Church are directed as toward their end, is achieved in the most efficacious possible way. (n°. 10)

... therefore the liturgical life of the parish and its relationship to the bishop must be fostered theoretically and practically among the faithful and clergy; efforts also must be made to encourage a sense of community within the parish, above all in the common celebration of the Sunday Mass. (n°. 42)

The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God; because they are signs they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it; that is why they are called “sacraments of faith.” They do indeed impart grace, but, in addition, the very act of celebrating them most effectively disposes the faithful to receive this grace in a fruitful manner, to worship God duly, and to practice charity. (n°. 59)

General Instruction of the Roman Missal

The celebration of Mass, as the action of Christ and the People of God arrayed hierarchically, is the center of the whole Christian life for the Church both universal and local, as well as for each of the faithful individually. In it is found the high point both of the action by which God sanctifies the world in Christ and of the worship that the human race offers to the Father, adoring him through Christ, the Son of God, in the Holy Spirit. In it, moreover, during the course of the year, the mysteries of redemption are recalled so as in some way to be made present. Furthermore, the other sacred actions and all the activities of the Christian life are bound up with it, flow from it, and are ordered to it. (n°. 16)

IN THE TRADITION

“You cannot pray at home as at church, where there is a great multitude, where exclamations are cried out to God as from one great heart, and where there is something more: the union of minds, the accord of souls, the bond of charity, the prayers of the priests.”

St. John Chrysostom,
De incomprehensibili, 3

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

✠ “The duty to offer God authentic worship concerns man both as an individual and as a social being.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 2136

✠ “God entrusted the sabbath to Israel to keep as a sign of the irrevocable covenant. The sabbath is for the Lord, holy and set apart for the praise of God, his work of creation, and his saving actions on behalf of Israel.”

CCC, n°. 2171

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Common Preface IV

For, although you have no need of our praise, yet our thanksgiving is itself your gift...

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What can you do to remind yourself that participation at Mass is meant, principally, to praise God and pray for sanctification of the world?
2. How is authentic praise of God the source of care for our neighbor?
3. How can prayer at Mass be connected to our everyday life?

FOR FURTHER READING

Virgil Michel, *Christian Social Reconstruction*, (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing Company, 1937).

Lambert Beauduin, *Liturgy, the Life of the Church*, (Hampshire, UK: Saint Michael's Abbey Press, 2002).