

CELEBRATING THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY
BY FR. JEREMY DRISCOLL, O.S.B.

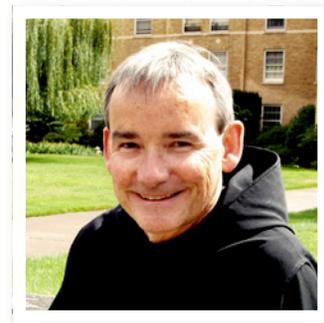
THE LITURGY

WORK OF THE HOLY TRINITY

THE FATHER

SOURCE AND GOAL OF THE LITURGY

In the first of these regular columns that comment on the second pillar of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, I spoke of just one section, §1076, which offers a dense but accessible theological opening to the nature of the liturgy. This paragraph is followed by a section which bears the same title as the title of this present article. Sections 1077 to 1112 are a beautiful treatment of how the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all at work in the Church's liturgy, each in a different but profoundly related way. The section is divided into smaller parts which treat in turn the roles of each member of the Trinity, beginning with the Father. I will comment now on the paragraphs that concern the Father (§§1077-1083), leaving the other sections for later columns. In all that I say about these paragraphs, I try to unfold the riches that are packed into the various formulations. It is my hope that, once having followed the commentary, my reader will find that the words of the *Catechism* thereafter stand forth in all their strength. And then one could refer back to the *Catechism*—and not this article!—to recall and deepen the grasp on the very rich thinking of the Church expressed there.



Fr. Jeremy Driscoll, O.S.B. is a monk of Mount Angel Abbey in St. Benedict, OR. He is a professor of theology at Mount Angel Seminary and at the Pontifical Athenaeum Sant'Anselmo in Rome.

One of the stylistic features of the *Catechism* that I particularly appreciate is how it very often just “talks Scripture,” that is, it embeds scriptural verses seamlessly into its discourse and makes these verses part of the whole. This is routinely done without a particular introduction that would begin something like, “As St. Paul [or somebody else] says...” This has the effect of saturating the catechetical text with Scripture and at the same time rendering the teaching in the form of a deepened grasp of Scripture or of its further unfolding. This Scriptural discourse is the style employed to open this section on the Father. Without saying so, the text begins with the beautiful hymn of praise that St. Paul uses to open his letter to the Ephesians. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...” (CCC §1077). The biblical text is well suited to begin a development on the Trinity, for it mentions “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” and further says that it is he who is blessing us in Christ. (The Spirit will be mentioned shortly after; it is normal in Trinitarian talk to begin with Father and Son.) But the biblical text is likewise chosen because the *Catechism* wants to focus on the words *blessed* and *blessing* and to use the concept of blessing to describe liturgy.

The notion of blessing moves in two directions (CCC §1078). It describes what God has done and continues to do for us, but it also describes what we do in response to God’s blessing.

We bless God, as the language of the psalter teaches us often to do, as in “Bless the Lord, O my soul!” or “I will bless the Lord at all times!” or many such similar expressions. With this twofold direction of *blessing* established, the *Catechism* can then make a very large statement: “From the beginning until the end of time the whole of God’s work is a blessing” (CCC §1079).

It should be noticed that the *Catechism’s* language is not explicitly about liturgy yet. This approach wants to put liturgy into a larger category, a category as big as God’s whole dealing with his creation from the beginning to the end of time.

This thought is developed in the several sentences and paragraphs that follow. This huge sweep of “from the beginning to the end of time” is displayed in the way we know it from the Bible. The creation itself is a blessing, “especially man and woman.” The peace established after the flood with Noah is mentioned and the qualitative shift in blessing that begins with Abraham (CCC §1080). Then an impressive list of *blessings* is unfolded, and the *Catechism’s* language becomes an eloquent echo and summary of the major epochs of blessing that the Bible narrates:

The divine blessings were made manifest in astonishing and saving events: the birth of Isaac, the escape from Egypt (Passover and Exodus), the gift of the promised land, the election of David, the presence of God in the Temple, the purifying exile, and return of a 'small remnant.' The Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, interwoven in the liturgy of the Chosen People, recall these divine blessings and at the same time respond to them with blessings of praise and thanksgiving (CCC §1081).

This long list successfully impresses upon us how varied and abundant the blessings of God have been. It is indeed “astonishing.”

At the end of the paragraph just cited, liturgy is at last explicitly mentioned, “the liturgy of the Chosen People.” The twofold direction of blessing is recalled again because repetition is good teaching, and the point is more concrete now because of the preceding long list. The shape of liturgy is emerging out of the huge sweep of blessings mentioned: liturgy “recall[s] these divine blessings and at the same time respond[s] to them with blessings of praise and thanksgiving.”

The next paragraph follows quite naturally from this, but at the same time it marks a significant qualitative shift. Carefully constructing this rich context of blessing from the beginning of creation and through the history of the Chosen People, the Church can now express in a very direct statement her belief about

her own liturgy: “In the Church’s liturgy the divine blessing is fully revealed and communicated” (CCC §1082). A great deal is claimed in this simple sentence. In the context of the vast history of divine blessing (a history as old-as-the-world), the *Catechism* zeroes in on a particular context: the Church’s liturgy. And about this liturgy, two things are claimed. First, in the Church’s liturgy, divine blessing is fully revealed. Second, the blessing is not only revealed, it is also communicated. We should pause to be sure we have grasped the enormity and wonder of this claim. We should recall it every time we celebrate the liturgy.

The short sentence needs development, of course. In the sentences that follow, the development is explicitly Trinitarian in its formulation. Likewise, the notion of *blessing* continues to be the leitmotiv of all that is said. So, developing this thought, it can be said that the divine blessing is fully revealed and communicated in the Church’s liturgy because,

“the Father is acknowledged and adored as the source and the end of all the blessings of creation and salvation.” This is a first dimension of liturgy: we acknowledge the Father as the source and end of blessing, and we adore him. We bless him for blessing us. But what is the climax of the Father’s action of blessing? The next sentence says it: “In his Word who became incarnate, died, and rose for us, he fills us with his blessings.” In terms of Trinitarian theology this sentence is carefully constructed. The second person of the Trinity is acting in his incarnation, death and resurrection, but he is named as the Father’s Word in whom the Father fills us with his blessing. We are in the heart of the Trinitarian mystery here. The Father is the source of another, “his Word,” through whom he acts, through whom he blesses.

This concentrated presence and action of the Father’s Word, Jesus Christ, is a second dimension of liturgy. The next sentence continues the development of this display of the mystery of the Trinity and gives us a third dimension of the liturgy: “Through his Word, he pours into our hearts the Gift that contains all gifts, the Holy Spirit.” Theologically this is a perfectly balanced sentence

and a profound thought. The Father remains the subject; he acts through his Word; and through that Word he gives us the greatest blessing of all: the Holy Spirit. If one were to say, “Show me all that!” then we could point to the liturgy and say, “In the Church’s liturgy the divine blessing is fully revealed and communicated.”

The final paragraph of this section of the *Catechism* on the Father as the source and goal of all liturgy is an even more tightly packed Trinitarian formulation. The paragraph gathers into several statements all the rich ideas laid out in what has preceded. The twofold direction of *Blessing* remains essential to follow this paragraph’s sense. The liturgy is called “a response of faith and love to the spiritual blessings the Father bestows on us...” (CCC §1083). The two directions are both there: the Father’s blessings and our response. But our response is described in an elaborate sentence that names the Church in the liturgy and each of the members of the Trinity in different positions:

...the Church never ceases to present to the Father the offering of his own gifts and to beg him to send the Holy Spirit upon that offering, upon herself, upon the faithful, and upon the

whole world, so that through communion in the death and resurrection of Christ the Priest, and by the power of the Spirit, these divine blessings will bring forth the fruits of life ‘to the praise of his glorious grace.’

We have come full circle from the citation of St. Paul that opened this section. In the liturgy we are exclaiming, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...” A phrase from the full citation of the Pauline text is used again now to finish this section and to indicate that this paragraph concludes the development. Both directions of blessing are there. The Church prays that the divine blessings will bring forth the fruits of “the praise of his glorious grace.” The praise of his glorious grace— this indeed is an excellent way to say what we are doing when we celebrate liturgy.

