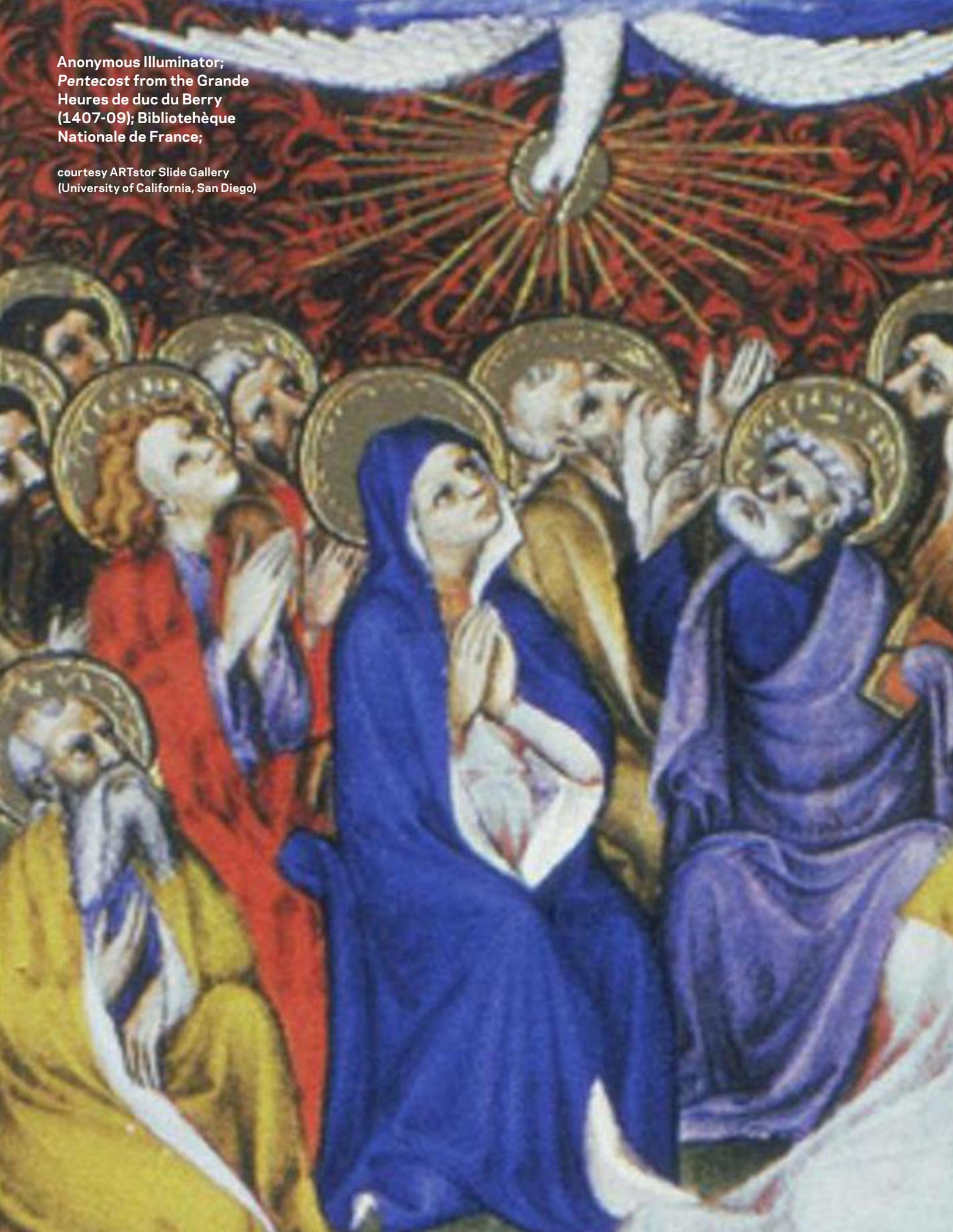


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CELEBRATING THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY

BY JEREMY DRISCOLL, O.S.B.

THE LITURGY— WORK OF THE HOLY TRINITY:

**THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH IN THE LITURGY
(PART 2)**

This is the second part of a three part article considering the paragraphs titled “The Holy Spirit and the Church in the Liturgy,” in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (§§1091-1109). We saw in the previous article that the *Catechism* treats the Holy Spirit and the Church together in this section precisely because it wants to emphasize that the Spirit brings it about that the liturgy actually becomes “the common work of the Holy Spirit and the Church” (§1091). In the strongest sense of the word, the Spirit and the Church *co-operate* in the liturgy. The priority, of course, is in the Spirit’s action; but the Spirit acts on the Church in such a way that it can genuinely be said that liturgy is also the Church’s work, the Church’s action. Four verbs summarize the Spirit’s action: the Spirit *prepares* the Church to meet Christ, *recalls* Christ, *makes present* his mystery, and *unites* the Church to Him (§1092). Each of these dimensions is developed under separate subtitles. In the previous article we examined the section titled “The Holy Spirit *prepares* for the reception of Christ.” We turn now to the second of the four subtitled parts (§§1099-1103).

The Holy Spirit recalls the mystery of Christ. This section begins by using the technical liturgical word *memorial*. It says, “... the liturgy is the *memorial* of salvation,” and then adds, “The Holy Spirit is the Church’s living memory” (§1099). This beautiful little sentence is worth unfolding. A footnote attached to it leads to John 14:26, where Jesus said, “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have told you.” Jesus’ promise still holds good. It is as fresh as ever. And one could point to the liturgy as the place where it is precisely and most fully realized.

The words of Jesus reveal that the dimension of the liturgy that is a “memorial” of the past is something far larger than the effort of a human community to keep close over time, despite the vicissitudes of history, to the memory of important past events. It is instead a divine work in which the Father sends us another gift, the Holy Spirit, to keep the gift of his Son’s own incarnate presence among human beings as fresh as in its first particular appearance in first-century Palestine. Two thousand years between us and the historical Jesus is not

a gap when the Spirit is “the Church’s living memory.” The Spirit’s work is a divine work, and so is complete, total, fully accomplished.

Two dimensions of the liturgy reveal the Spirit at work in this way, and these are treated in two smaller subtitles in this section: *the Word of God* and *Anamnesis*. We all know that Scripture is read in the liturgy, but what actually is happening when that is done? Some particular member of the assembly stands up and reads, but the Spirit is operating through this action. “The Holy Spirit first recalls the meaning of the salvation event to the liturgical assembly by giving life to the Word of God...” (§1100). Two words are crucial to the claims of this sentence: *meaning* and *life*. When we hear words, they can mean many things, often too many, perhaps even contradictory. Words are risky. But the assembly is not left simply to itself and to its own wits alone for penetrating the words of Scripture correctly. The Spirit “recalls the meaning”— the divinely intended meaning “of the salvation event.” In addition to meaning, the Spirit gives life to the words. Again, words are risky. At worse, they could just be so many sounds



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hitting against eardrums, or they could have no more effect than the vague sensation of, “I’ve heard that before.” Instead, in the liturgy, the Spirit gives life to the words in such a way that they can be received and lived for what they truly are; namely, the very Word of God in the irreducible newness of this present moment of proclamation.

“The Holy Spirit gives a spiritual understanding of the Word of God to those who read or hear it...” (§1101). The idea of spiritual understanding of the Word is introduced here as yet another concept to build upon *meaning* and *life* mentioned in the previous paragraph. Sometimes nowadays the word “spiritual” is used by religious seekers or refers to religious seekers in any number of fairly vague ways, but in Christian theology the word “spiritual” is always traceable to the Holy Spirit and to the specific work of the Holy Spirit in the divine economy. So, if here it is a question of “a spiritual understanding of the Word of God [for] those who read or hear it,” that means that the Spirit will put worshipers “into a living relationship with Christ, the Word and Image of the Father...” (§1101). A living relationship with Christ *is* the spiritual understanding of Scripture. And it is typical that we experience and know the Spirit in the Spirit’s referring us to another, to Christ, and to Christ recognized as the Word and Image of the Father.

We do well to recall that we are examining a part of the *Catechism* that speaks about the Liturgy as the Work of the Holy Trinity, where the role of each member of the Trinity is distinguished and discussed. Here, in speaking about the Spirit’s role, the other Persons of the Trinity are completely implicated, as we have had occasion to see already in other formulations. This is a beautiful yielding of one Person of the Trinity toward the other. The *Spirit* puts us in a living relationship with the *Son* and helps us to know Him as Word and Image of the *Father*. All this is happening in the liturgy as the Word

of God is read. All this is what it means to say, “The Holy Spirit recalls the mystery of Christ,” as the title of this section indicates.

But there is more. “The proclamation does not stop with a teaching; it elicits the *response of faith* as consent and commitment, directed at the covenant between God and his people” (§1102). So far we have seen a number of key words expressing what the Spirit delivers by means of the liturgical words and actions: *meaning, life, understanding, living relationship* with Christ. Now the direction shifts. All this requires a response, but the response itself is helped by the Spirit. This divine help is needed so that our particular response can be more than what we might come up with by ourselves, so that it can be bigger than the sum of the parts of the vision of a particular gathered community. That bigger response is here described as “consent and commitment directed at the covenant between God and his people.” So, Christian liturgy is more than simply some of the baptized gathered together to hear a little Scripture and think about it. The hearing of Scripture in the Spirit ought to bring us to nothing less than a consent and commitment to enter into—huge words!—the covenant between God and his people. “Covenant” is one way of summarizing the content of the whole of Scripture. Scripture is the story of the covenant. In the liturgy we do not hear this story as information about religious people of the past. Hearing it means for us to enter into that same covenant in the here and now of this particular liturgy: “...it is the Holy Spirit who gives the grace of faith, strengthens it and makes it grow in the community” (§1102).

All these ideas considered so far were under the smaller subtitle “The Word of God.” The next smaller subtitle is “Anamnesis,” and this is treated in just one paragraph. *Anamnesis* is a technical word used to describe a fundamental dimension of all liturgy, and its introduction here is part of the learning that the *Catechism* wants to promote. A simple, useful description is offered: “the liturgical celebration always refers to God’s saving interventions in history” (§1103). We could say that God’s saving interventions in history are a large part of the content of liturgy. Those interventions are what many of the words refer to, whether they are the words of Scripture or of prayer; and they are also the sense and meaning of the various symbols and ritual actions. This is true of all liturgical celebrations. At this point the *Catechism* is speaking in general terms that are meant to apply to all the sacraments and all the other liturgies that the Church celebrates. In all of these, “the celebration ‘makes a remembrance’ of the marvelous works of God in an anamnesis which may be more or less developed” (§1103). The center of the saving interventions of God in history is, of course, the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ; and this is the ultimate content of all anamnesis. In the liturgy, the Death and Resurrection of Christ is “remembered” in a qualitatively unique way. It is remembered by the Holy Spirit for the Church. Then there is “co-operation.” The Church willingly makes remembrance in the way that the Spirit fashions. This is not memory in the form of information from the past. It is memory that gives *meaning, life, understanding, living relationship* with Christ. And, “The Holy Spirit who thus awakens the memory of the Church then inspires thanksgiving and praise (*doxology*)” (§1103).

We have examined here five rich paragraphs grouped under the title, “The Holy Spirit recalls the mystery of Christ.” This is the second of four subtitles that treat the role of the Holy Spirit and the Church in the liturgy. The third subtitle picks up immediately from this sense of the memory of the past and brings it into the present. The first sentence of the next section connects us with this. “Christian liturgy not only recalls the events that saved us but actualizes them, makes them present” (§1104). This will be the subject of our next article.



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