

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 3)

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*This is the third 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). In all these paragraphs it is explained how “the liturgy becomes the common work of the Holy Spirit and the Church” (§1091). Four subtitled parts explain the Spirit’s action by developing four verbs: in the liturgy the Spirit *prepares* the Church to meet Christ, *recalls* Christ, *makes present* his mystery, and *unites* the Church to him (§1092). It is the last two of these verbs that the present article treats under the third and fourth subtitles.*





Father Marko Ivan Rupnik; *The Baptism of the Lord*, mosaic detail: Holy Spirit (2007); Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary (Lourdes); Photo: Carolyn A. Pirtle (2010).

The Holy Spirit makes present the mystery of Christ.
(§§1104-1107)

The previous subtitled section explained the way in which recalling the saving events of God in history is a major dimension of the liturgy. But this does not exhaust all that happens. “Christian liturgy not only recalls the events that saved us but actualizes them, makes them present” (§1104). This is followed by a sentence that makes a very useful distinction: “The Paschal Mystery of Christ is celebrated, not repeated.” With the term “Paschal Mystery” the *Catechism* goes to the heart of what is remembered in liturgy. A cross reference is given to §1085, which was examined in an earlier article in this series (*Church Life* vol. 1, no. 3). There I called §1085 one of the densest and most beautiful paragraphs of the entire *Catechism*. When the *Catechism* makes a cross reference, it is always useful to consult the paragraph to which we are referred. Sometimes the referenced paragraph simply enriches the point in question, but at other times it is critical to understanding the point. The latter is the case here.

I will not repeat the detailed analysis that my earlier article offered. I hope that just several lines of that important paragraph cited here can throw into relief the importance of this cross reference. We read, “The Paschal mystery of Christ, by contrast, cannot remain only in the past, because by his death he destroyed death, and all that Christ is—all that he did and suffered for all men— participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times while being made present in them all” (§1085). This is the logic behind saying now at §1104 that, “The Paschal Mystery of Christ is celebrated, not repeated.” That the Paschal Mystery can be made present in all times is the work of the Holy Spirit and comes about through the liturgical celebration. §1104 continues, “It is the celebrations that are repeated, and in each celebration there is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that makes the unique mystery present.”

§1105 introduces the technical liturgical term *epiclesis*, a term always associated with the Holy Spirit in the liturgy. It explains, “The *Epiclesis* (“invocation upon”) is the intercession in which the priest begs the Father to send the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, so that the offerings may become the body and blood of Christ and that the faithful, by receiving them, may themselves become a living offering to God.” This explanation focuses on what happens in the Eucharist, where the strongest, most forceful action of the Spirit is at work. In the present moment of the liturgy the offerings are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. As such, the transformed offerings render present the Paschal Mystery, whose roots are in the past but in the here and now of the liturgy “transcends all times while being made present in them all.”

Further, the Paschal Mystery is rendered present not in some static way. That is impossible and would contradict the very meaning of the Mystery. Rather, it is rendered present in a way that directly effects us who celebrate. It is rendered present precisely in such a way that the faithful who receive the Body and Blood of Christ may be themselves transformed into what they receive and in this way become “a living offering to God.”

Taken seriously, these are dizzying claims. When the Father sends the Spirit onto the offerings, bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ; and we who receive them are transformed by the same Spirit into what we receive. This “form” into which we are “trans-formed” is named here “living offering to God,” and a footnote references Romans 12:1. It is important to take note of this scriptural warrant because this verse virtually from the beginning of the Christian community’s existence has exercised enormous influence on how the eucharistic celebration is understood. Paul is taking account here of the enormous implications of life in Christ and contrasting it with his own former Jewish practice and worship.

What is possible now in Christ is a new kind of sacrifice, a new kind of worship, a new cult. Paul urges—and the reader feels his solemn wonder—“offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, your spiritual worship.” What Paul is speaking about here effectively comes about when “the faithful, by receiving [the transformed gifts] themselves become a living offering to God.”

Even if the illustration here of the word *epiclesis* is made in reference to the Eucharist, what is said is meant to apply more broadly. “Together with the anamnesis, the epiclesis is at the heart of each sacramental celebration...” (§1106). This is not developed further in the *Catechism*, but awareness of anamnesis and epiclesis in every celebration of any of the sacraments is one of the most effective ways of attending to what is happening, what is effected by the Holy Trinity, in that celebration. (I hope to write about this in future articles in this journal.)

In this subtitle about how the Holy Spirit makes present the mystery of Christ, the connection with the past has been clearly made. The events from the past that saved us are actualized and made present. The last paragraph of this subtitle also speaks of something more paradoxical, more unexpected. The Spirit also mysteriously causes the future to make its presence and effects felt now. “While we wait in hope he [the Holy Spirit] causes us really to anticipate the fullness of communion with the Holy Trinity” (§1107). Communion with the Holy Trinity is meant to be our definitive future, yet even now, in the liturgy, we are really anticipating that future. The Spirit is the gift of the Father given to the Church in answer to her request for precisely that. “Sent by the Father who hears the epiclesis of the Church, the Spirit gives life to those who accept him and is, even now, the ‘guarantee’ of their inheritance.” The *Catechism* places the word “guarantee” in quotation marks and in a footnote refers us to Eph 1:14 and 2 Cor 1:22. St. Paul uses this word

for the Holy Spirit, and the community experiences that guarantee in the liturgy. In the present here and now of what the Spirit does for us, we already enjoy the inheritance for which we are destined. In Paul's own words: "we...were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:14).

The communion of the Holy Spirit. (§§1108-1109)

This is the fourth and final subtitle in the section of the *Catechism* treating the Holy Spirit and the Church in the liturgy. The word "communion" is used to indicate the culmination of what the Spirit *prepares, recalls, and makes present*. "In every liturgical action the Holy Spirit is sent in order to bring us into communion with Christ and so to form his Body" (§1108). Closely associated with this is another word: "cooperation"; and with this word the *Catechism* comes full circle from a point introduced at the beginning of this whole development. I have had occasion more than once to take note of the *Catechism's* stress that the liturgy becomes the common work of the Holy Spirit and the Church. This can be said again now at the end. "The most intimate cooperation of the Holy Spirit and the Church is achieved in the liturgy." The Spirit is called here Spirit of communion, and the Church is called "the great sacrament of divine communion which gathers God's scattered children together." Gathered where and how? Communion with whom? "Communion with the Holy Trinity and fraternal communion are inseparably the fruit of the Spirit in the liturgy" (§1108).

The last paragraph of this whole section on the Spirit and the Church can serve as a succinct and moving summary of all that we have seen in these three articles. "The mission of the Holy Spirit in the liturgy of the Church is to prepare the assembly to encounter Christ; to recall and manifest Christ to the faith of the assembly; to make the saving work of Christ present and active by his transforming power; and to make the gift of communion bear fruit in the Church" (§1112).



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