

Liturgy and the New Evangelization

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Practicing the Art of Self-Giving Love

Timothy P. O'Malley



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In gratitude to my wife,
Kara,
who has taught me to live the nuptial liturgy
each day of our married life.

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Introduction

The gift of “real” love is something that each human being desires. We first know this love while gazing into the eyes of our parents. We seek authentic friendships, ones in which a communion of souls takes place. We desire romantic love, to encounter another human being whose beauty and goodness is transformative of our identity. We are made to love, to give ourselves away as a response to the gift we have already received.

Whatever the new evangelization is, it is incomprehensible outside the domain of love. Not simply the love of one human being for another, though such love is indeed *very* good. Rather, the church’s mission of the new evangelization is coming to perceive anew the logic of self-giving love revealed in Jesus Christ; a revelation of divine love that expands our imaginations regarding the possibility of what human love could become when knit into the triune God’s own life.¹ A love made manifest in the life of the church, in those disciples filled with joy who have become members of the Body of Christ: “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:9-11).² The new evangelization, for this reason, is nothing less than a recommitment to God’s own pedagogy of love as mediated through the church’s ministries of proclamation, prayer, and mission.

Because the new evangelization is fundamentally a renewal of the church’s eyes of love, it must be liturgical. Of course, this claim can easily be misunderstood. The liturgical context of the new evangelization is not simply an affirmation of the centrality of liturgy in the church’s life. Instead, what I mean to propose is that the practices of the church’s liturgical rites function in such a way that they are to inform every aspect of the church’s mission of the new evangelization. For in liturgical rites, we do not only consider the love of God as a theoretical possibility but we *participate* in such

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love through visible signs and words. Our desires and hopes, our sorrows and tears, are taken up into God's own life and made into a spiritual offering. In such moments, we allow God's own gift of love to be written upon the contours of our bodies, now given over to the world as a sacramental offering: "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:1-2). As long as the purpose of the new evangelization is humanity's partaking in the self-giving love of God, then liturgical prayer is integral to this "new evangelization."

This book ultimately has three purposes relative to articulating the liturgical task of the new evangelization. First, it seeks to develop a liturgical and thus theological argument about the nature of the new evangelization. The new evangelization is not simply about the adoption of novel pastoral programs, the cultivation of small-group faith sharing, the strengthening of Catholic identity in schools and parishes, the use of social media in spreading the Gospel, or a renewed confidence in performing public professions of faith. These are instruments that are part of a larger narrative, one that has yet to be fully articulated. As the *Lineamenta* for the Synod on the New Evangelization states:

Presently, in reviewing the dynamics of the "new evangelization," the expression can now be applied to the Church's renewed efforts to meet the challenges which today's society and cultures, in view of the significant changes taking place, are posing to the Christian faith, its proclamation and its witness. In facing these challenges, the Church does not give up or retreat into herself; instead, she undertakes a project to revitalize herself. She makes the Person of Jesus Christ and a personal encounter with him central to her thinking, knowing that he will give his Spirit and provide the force to announce and proclaim the Gospel in new ways which can speak to today's cultures.³

The new evangelization becomes in this case a transformation of all culture, of all human existence, spurred on by an encounter with Christ himself. Indeed, in every generation, the church must perform a "new evangelization," seeking to incarnate the Christian faith anew, to recommence the divine-human exchange that has defined Christian history. And in this way, the grammar of liturgical prayer can help the church better understand how to carry out the new evangelization as a form of self-giving love.

The second purpose of this book relates to the renewal of both liturgical practice and formation. In the postconciliar years, a kind of positivism has developed relative to the formative nature of liturgical prayer. Simply, we have assumed that the performance of rites and subsequent reflection upon liturgical practice will lead to certain intellectual and spiritual dispositions. The one who participates in the liturgy will have a solid grasp of the salvific narrative manifested in the Bible, of the spiritual practice of psalmody, of a robust theology of baptism, etc. Often, as liturgists, we have allowed ourselves to shape specific decisions regarding liturgical practice in order to communicate an idea, a principle, which we view as essential to the Christian life. Against such a claim, I hope to demonstrate that the “formative” potential of liturgical prayer in the modern context remains a rather elusive reality.

For example, few ritual activities within Catholicism are more exemplary of this complicated process of liturgical formation than the rite of infant baptism. This rite performs certain theological and cultural claims of Catholicism regarding this sacrament.⁴ The preferred place and time of baptism is within the Easter Vigil or Sunday eucharistic liturgy so as to bring out the paschal quality of the sacrament.⁵ The theological imagery surrounding infant baptism within the rite is becoming a child of God, being enlightened, as well as washing away the effects of original sin. The responsibility for the developing faith of the infant is placed in the hands of the parents and godparents, and the gathered assembly.⁶ Yet, as any pastoral minister is aware, the cultural meaning “communicated” through the rite of baptism is not necessarily the same act of meaning created by its participants. The presider of the sacrament may choose one series of prayers within the rite over another, emphasizing a baptismal theology that resonates with his preferred interpretation of the sacrament. The couple baptizing their child may miss this subtle theological move by the priest or deacon, instead conceiving of baptism as a formal acknowledgement of new life, a rite of passage performed by the church but ultimately about family and tradition. One pair of grandparents may express gratitude that their grandchild has been rescued from the flames of hell, while the other may see some sadness upon this occasion, since their once-Jewish daughter has promised to raise her child within the church. The assembly will have a similar range of meanings, from a sense of paschal joy at seeing new members entering into the Body of Christ, to boredom and annoyance that yet another interruption to Mass has occurred. If the ministers within the church desire a fruitful reception of the sacrament on the part of the infant,

one that involves both an understanding of the official theology of the rite by the parents and godparents, as well as a way of life that has become baptismal within the family and the assembly, the ministers will need to be cognizant of the official theology of the rite; the presumed dispositions necessary for fruitful reception and participation within the sacrament by the various parties; and, the already acquired dispositions that act as lens through which the official meaning of the sacramental rite must pass.

Thus, if one is to perform a liturgical education that is evangelical, transformative of history, culture, and each individual life, then the church must dedicate itself to discerning anew that *savoir faire* necessary for teaching Christians the art of liturgical prayer in our own age. Catholicism's new evangelization is an opportune time to examine practices of formation in light of present cultural realities (some of which are opposed to the pedagogy of divine love performed in the church's liturgical rites). Liturgical formation in the new evangelization will include much more than reflection upon one's own experience of a specific rite. Instead, such liturgical formation will enable one to engage in liturgical activity; to participate in liturgical prayer in such a way that one's very attitude toward human life itself is transformed.

Lastly, this book attends to the wisdom implicit in the liturgical practice of the church. That is, while liturgical prayer may not *immediately* instill certain intellectual and spiritual dispositions, such prayer does seek to *gradually* form us in a liturgical approach to human life: to work and marriage, to art and beauty, to education and leisure, to politics and justice. As Jean Corbon notes in his classic text, *The Wellspring of Worship*:

If the liturgy is the mystery of the river of life that streams from the Father and the Lamb and if it reaches us and draws us when we celebrate it, then it does so in order that it may water our entire life and render it fruitful. The eternal liturgy in which the economy of salvation reaches completion "is accomplished" by us in our sacramental celebrations in order that it may in turn be accomplished in us, in the least fibers of our being and of our human community.⁷

When we begin to understand how liturgical practice transfigures our imaginations, our desires, everything that it means to be human, then we will begin to see the concrete ways that the wisdom of liturgical prayer may overflow into our own existence here and now. How participation in the liturgical rites of the church gradually inspires the Christian toward a mysticism of the ordinary, to an offering of the return gift of our very lives as an act of love.

This book will consist of five chapters. First, I will unfold a liturgical theology of evangelization in chapter 1. This liturgical theology begins with an analysis of “evangelization” as it is treated in three key documents: Paul VI’s *Evangelium Nuntiandi*, John Paul II’s *Catechesi Tradendae*, and lastly the *General Directory for Catechesis*. Having set up a working definition of evangelization, the substance of chapter 1 is a re-reading of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* in light of the theme of liturgical evangelization. Liturgical prayer is evangelical insofar as it enables one to participate in God’s self-giving love, capacitating each Christian to offer him or herself for the transfiguration of history, culture, and each human relationship through the paschal mystery. In the second chapter, I turn toward an analysis of those cultural obstacles in the United States that necessitate a new evangelization relative to liturgical prayer. In the United States, the primary context of our prayer is a form of secularization, aptly called “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” by the sociologist Christian Smith. Such an approach to religious understanding is particularly problematic when considering what it means to participate fully, consciously, and actively in the liturgical prayer of the church. Moralistic Therapeutic Deism effects this participation in three major ways in the United States, including a thinning of the Christian’s imagination, a decreased desire toward a deeper understanding of the rites, and an exclusive focus upon individual flourishing. If the liturgical prayer of the church is to become a site of this new evangelization, then these issues must be addressed strategically in the church’s pastoral approach to liturgical formation.

In the final three chapters, I outline strategic areas relative to performing the church’s mission of the new evangelization relative to liturgical prayer. The first area includes a commitment to fostering the imagination of the Christian through a deeper attention to the proclamation of the narrative of salvation, the promotion of the liturgical homily. The second area is dedicated to renewing within the Catholic imagination an integral link between liturgical prayer and vocation. And the third considers “rites of return,” focusing less on those who are returning to the church and more upon what is waiting for them in the church’s liturgical life.

This essay in liturgical evangelization will not address every facet of how liturgical prayer is integral to the new evangelization. But the hope is that the reader might encounter in this text a renewal of one’s own imagination regarding the formative and thus transformative potential of liturgical prayer in the life of the church. For such prayer is not intended as either an aesthetic exercise in presenting the mystery of God through signs, nor an

effective pedagogical tool for promoting one form of ideology above another. Rather, liturgical prayer seeks to elevate our humanity into the very life of God, teaching us over the course of our lifetimes what it means to practice the art of self-giving love. Such a formation is not intended for the renewal of the church's prayer alone but as a gift to the whole cosmos; as a way of incarnating within both our individual and communal history the radically disruptive fact that God is love.

In an introduction to a book on the new evangelization, it also seems prudent to include some biographical note regarding my own formation. I am a Roman Catholic theologian, whose first encounter with both the intellectual and spiritual life of the church occurred in the context of the postconciliar liturgical rites to which I am deeply committed today. Growing up in the Diocese of Knoxville, in which Catholics are definitively a minority, the Catholic liturgical imagination stood out against the backdrop of other Christian traditions. Traveling with fellow youth to monasteries (as we did every summer), encountering the Office of the church at a young age, I came to see how every aspect of our humanity is offered up in liturgical prayer. I owe the monks of St. Bernard's Abbey in Cullman, Alabama a note of thanks for this insight.

At the University of Notre Dame, where I did my undergraduate and master's work, I learned to study the liturgy as a source of theological and spiritual insight. I learned from John Cavadini, David Fagerberg, Maxwell Johnson, and Nathan Mitchell the importance of the liturgical-sacramental life to the theological enterprise. My own doctoral work at Boston College, focusing on liturgical-sacramental theology, spirituality, and preaching, renewed my imagination regarding how to write and teach persuasively and truthfully about liturgical prayer. Here, my gratitude extends to the thoughtful guidance of Khaled Anatolios, John Baldovin, S.J., Thomas Groome, Paul Kolbet, Bruce Morrill, S.J., and Jane Regan. While at Boston College, located in a city that has grown tired of the mystery of Catholicism, which suffers from the wounds of an institution that committed so many sins against its members, I began to recognize the need for a new evangelization: an evangelization that seeks to recapture the imagination and the desires of the faithful regarding what takes place in the liturgical rites of the church.

I then returned to the University of Notre Dame, taking up directorship of the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy. Here, in teaching undergraduates, I came to recognize their own incapacity (at least for some of them) to see liturgical prayer as anything more than a public celebration of what a certain community thinks about the world. Equally so, they expressed to me

suspensions regarding Catholicism, doubts about the validity of doctrine, tradition, and prescribed prayer forms. In some ways, this work was written with these students in mind; it is an attempt to offer a persuasive, and I hope true, vision of liturgical prayer that is not a subjugation of our humanity to rules and regulations. Liturgical prayer is instead the opportunity to lift up the deepest desires of our hearts to the Father through the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

I cannot help but conclude with a note of gratitude to two dear friends. Leonard DeLorenzo, a co-worker at the Institute for Church Life, gave me my first opportunity to articulate a rather sophisticated, and perhaps too heady, version of a sacramental theology of gift to high school students in the Notre Dame Vision program—one of the many vocation initiatives inaugurated through the generosity of the Lilly Endowment. He also encouraged me to teach a course for Notre Dame undergraduates who serve as mentors-in-faith in this program, allowing me to further articulate a comprehensive vision of what constitutes the liturgical life of self-gift. I owe the substance of this work, its structure, and the pattern of speech, to what I have learned through Lenny's graciousness toward my work, not to mention countless conversations about the eucharistic shape of Christian vocation. Lastly, I would like to thank Kara, my beloved wife. A youth minister, a director of Christian formation, and now a stay-at-home catechist, Kara has formed me (the academic) to think about the pastoral life of the church. Further, during our years of marriage, of struggling to have a child, and then finally adopting in 2012, I have learned more from Kara about what constitutes the eucharistic vocation of marriage than from any text I have read or written. This work, despite its foibles and follies, is dedicated to her.

A Liturgical Theology of Evangelization 1

Speaking about “evangelization” in Catholic circles often requires a bit of care on the part of the educator. The cultural imagination perceives evangelization as a synonym for proselytizing: convincing co-workers, friends, and neighbors through guilt and subtle coercion to join one’s parish or congregation. A Catholic community in Massachusetts that carried out an assessment of strengths and weaknesses in its common life reacted with relief when informed that its major weakness was a failure to evangelize. In graduate seminars in catechetics, the topic of evangelization often requires numerous class sessions devoted to defending the use of the term. In the media, the term “evangelical” refers less to the proclamation of the Gospel, the transformation of all facets of human culture in light of Christ, and more to defined political commitments.

The reticence toward using the term “evangelization” is at least partially influenced by Christians whose belief systems have been formed by the American privatization of religion that treats benign tolerance as a necessary public virtue (see chapter 2). Even more so, the discomfort with using evangelization to describe the mission of the church reveals forgetfulness of the church’s very identity: the self-giving love of Jesus Christ (which is the very life of the triune God), now suffusing the church. Only when the sacramental nature of evangelization is remembered will the term become palatable, even persuasive to Catholics. And this deeper, theological nature of evangelization is best discovered through the liturgical life of the church.

This initial chapter seeks to restore a “Catholic” understanding of evangelization, one that is intrinsic to the liturgical renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council. Evangelization is not a political ideology smuggled in using theological language. It is the church’s mission to give of itself out of the depths of love for the renewal of the world.

Thus, this chapter will consist of two parts. First, I define evangelization with particular attention to postconciliar documents on evangelization. Second, I discern how a robust definition of evangelization is not simply implicit but intrinsic to the liturgical renewal enacted at the Second Vatican Council.

What Is Evangelization?

Falling in love is often a surprise, a moment in our lives in which our history is rewritten by the good news that we are indeed loved. The revelation of love reconfigures what we once thought were our priorities in life. The stories that we tell change as our individual journey is now knit into another's. I remember that when I first fell in love with my wife, I could not help but mention her name with near comic regularity in each conversation I had with friends and family alike. As we grow into this love in the context of marriage, the name of our husband or wife takes on the contours of our common narrative, of the maturing love that we have embodied in specific times and places. For me, to say the name "Kara" is not simply to utter four letters, consisting of two syllables, a word whose root is the Latin *caritas*; instead, this name recalls the person of my wife, the sorrows and joys that we shared as our mutual love has slowly formed us over the last decade.

This transformation of our identity through falling in love is perhaps even better represented in having a child. The joys of sleeping until one wakes up naturally, of leisurely weekend brunches, and of maximizing efficiency in work and home life is traded for restless nights, speedy meals while a son or daughter is sleeping, and an ever-changing routine dependent upon a newborn's needs. The surprise, of course, is not that having a child changes one's life, reconfiguring once sacrosanct schedules and rituals. Instead, it is that even the least palatable tasks become a kind of delight, an offering of love from parent to child. Becoming a parent is encountering the gift of love itself, a love so remarkable that our response is nothing less than total self-gift.

In order to understand what the church means by evangelization, it is essential that one grasp such moments of self-gift, of authentic encounter with the beloved. Evangelization is the grammar of the church's love, the nuptial speech of those who have encountered the love of God in Jesus Christ, a love sacramentally manifested in the church. Such love, the Christian dares to hope, not only transfigures our individual life but every aspect of history and society. The nature of evangelization as love may be found, at least implicitly, in those ecclesial documents that treat the term. It is to an exegesis of such documents that we now turn.

Reading Ecclesial Documents: A Method

Quoting ecclesial documents easily can become a tiresome affair—a gathering of authoritative proof texts to back up one’s particular claims. Such an approach to reading church documents inundates the reader with quotes, failing to make a particular argument regarding what the text means. Thus, if I am to define how evangelization is fundamentally a matter of self-giving love learned in the school of the Christ, most perfectly embodied in the liturgical-sacramental life of the church, it will require a *theological* approach to reading such documents. Church documents use shorthand, key phrases from previous theological inquiry to communicate a vision to the universal church. An astute reading of these documents often requires deeper attention to the theological wellspring, the very sources of thought that are implicit in the text. Through this theological approach, one comes to see that the term evangelization is nothing less than shorthand for how the church is to relate to the world, an expression of an ecclesiology that seeks the redemption of all humanity through the agapic pedagogy of the church.

Evangelium Nuntiandi

In 1974, the Synod of Bishops considered the theme of evangelization in the modern context, a concern arising from the Second Vatican Council’s concern “to make the Church of the twentieth century ever better fitted for proclaiming the Gospel to the people of the twentieth century.”¹ The synod acknowledged three guiding concerns: the failure of the Gospel to have a powerful effect on the human conscience in the modern world; the Gospel’s relative impoverishment in transforming human society in modernity; and a discernment of those methods most apt for performing evangelization in the twentieth century (EN 4). The document is clear that a renewal of the church’s ministry of proclamation is not a luxury but a “duty incumbent on her by the command of the Lord Jesus, so that people can believe and be saved” (EN 5).

As such, evangelization must begin from its christological center, from Christ who is the preeminent evangelist. Jesus Christ proclaims the Kingdom of God as an interruption of our limited notions of power and prestige (EN 8), the announcement of a liberating salvation that re-orientes life toward the Father (EN 9), the radical interior conversion made possible through the self-giving love of Christ on the cross (EN 10), and the suasive and revelatory preaching and deeds of the Word made flesh (EN 11). The church receives her mission of evangelization through her union with Christ; that

is, the community of the evangelized (those who have given themselves over to the prodigal logic of the kingdom of God) becomes evangelizers. Evangelization is not simply peripheral to the church's identity, an option for the committed. Instead, as Paul VI notes:

Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize, that is to say in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of his death and glorious Resurrection. (EN 14)

The entire mission of the church, its lived ecclesiology, is that of evangelization. The church gives itself over to its deepest identity as the beloved of Christ, letting its message infuse every part of the church's ministry.

Thus, evangelization is nothing less than shorthand for the church's mission of preaching, of catechesis, of sacramental ministry, and the deeds of love its members perform for the transfiguration of the world (EN 17). Such a process of evangelization is both transformative of the individual and society as a whole. Paul VI writes:

For the church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new: "Now I am making the whole of creation new." But there is no new humanity if there are not first of all new persons renewed by Baptism and by lives lived according to the Gospel. The purpose of evangelization is therefore precisely this interior change, and if it had to be expressed in one sentence the best way of stating it would be to say that the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the Message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieus which are theirs. (EN 18)

One can see that evangelization is no minor task. It is not reducible to pastoral programs, inviting Catholics to return to the church; to door-to-door preaching, proliferating Catholic thought through blogs, or inviting a co-worker to come to Mass (although, it may in fact involve such pastoral care and practice). Instead, evangelization is the transformation of all humanity, of all culture, of all society through an encounter with Christ: "of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God

and the plan of salvation” (EN 19). When the church is truly evangelical, it seeks to invite all of humanity to consider the Good News that salvation in Christ elevates what it means to be human—both individually and socially. Catholicism is an intrinsically evangelical faith insofar as it seeks not to promote its own bureaucratic structures but the union of all humanity in Christ. As Henri de Lubac writes, “Humanity is one, organically one by its divine structure; it the Church’s mission to reveal to men that pristine unity that they have lost, to restore and complete it.”² Evangelization requires a contemplation of the church’s narrative of salvation by believers, a self-examination of the interior life of those of us who are disciples of Christ, and an invitation offered to others to participate in that peaceful union of humanity and God enacted in the church’s life.

Therefore, the mere memorization or knowledge of the church’s doctrine, her creedal statements, her liturgical regulations and moral wisdom is not adequate for evangelization. The knowledge of such doctrine, of the liturgical life of the church, or the moral teaching that elevates human action toward the divine life, should become incarnate in family life, in human work, in politics and society, in art and leisure (EN 28–29). The doctrine of the incarnation becomes evangelical when it moves from expressing a historical idea from a distant past, to a manifestation of the enfleshment of the divine Word in the human condition, a realization that inevitably leads one to ponder what it means to be human. The liturgical life of the church becomes evangelical when the liturgical and sacramental rites of the church cease being performed in a perfunctory manner, but re-inscribe human life as a divine offering of love to the Father through the Son in the unity of the Spirit. The moral life, commitment to justice and charity at both the local and global level, moves from being a humanistic concern to an evangelical commitment when the individual sees his or her deeds of love as witnessing to the God who first loved us.

While the document treats other aspects of evangelization more extensively, the animating vision of the text is the transformation of human society, of life, of culture itself through the mediation of those Christians who have fallen so deeply in love with Jesus in the school of the church that their existence becomes part of the renewal of the world. Not because Christians hate the world, seeking to promote a sectarian mindset. Rather, the church can contemplate humanity, with all of its light and darkness, all of its sin and hope, through the icon of Christ. Jesus Christ embodies what we may become if we give ourselves over to the Word made flesh:

may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from

evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the Kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world. (EN 80)

The vision of evangelization, set out by Paul VI, is the process of divinization whereby our humanity, our society, every facet of human culture is gradually knit into the peace of the reign of God. The evangelizer, the one who seeks to serve as a medium of this transformation, operates out of the depths of Christian love, “the love of a father; and again, it is the love of mother. It is this love that the Lord expects from every preacher of the Gospel, from every builder of the Church . . . the concern to give the truth and to bring people into unity” (EN 79). Commitment to the mission of evangelization is a return-gift to the God who first loved us.

In conclusion, the church’s commitment to evangelization is not a sectarian strategy by those seeking to coerce the culture to believe in the Gospel at all costs. Rather, the turn to evangelization in the postconciliar years is an authentic, ecclesiological consequence of the understanding of the church articulated by the documents of the Second Vatican Council. As *Lumen Gentium* (LG) notes, “All are called to this catholic unity of the people of God which prefigures and promotes universal peace. And to it belong, or are related in different ways: the catholic faithful, ones who believe in Christ, and finally all of humankind, called by God’s grace to salvation.”³ The church evangelizes not out of a sense of hubris but in light of her deepest identity as “a sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race” (LG 1). At the origin of evangelization is the eucharistic nature of the church, seeking to draw all of humanity into one body, precisely that all of humanity may commune with the living God in peace. As Joseph Ratzinger writes:

The content of the Eucharist, what happens in it, is the uniting of Christians, bringing them from their state of separation into the unity of the one Bread and the one Body. The Eucharist is thus understood entirely in a dynamic ecclesiological perspective. It is the living process through which, time and again, the Church’s activity of becoming Church takes place.⁴

The eucharistic nature of evangelization means that the process of evangelization, of inviting all of humanity into a relationship with Christ, must be

carried out as a sacramental action of gratitude, a return-gift to the living God for the love that we have first received.

Catechesi Tradendae

Integrally linked to the church's mission of evangelization is catechesis. I have often heard fellow theologians refer derisively to "mere catechesis" in contradistinction to forms of theological inquiry expected at the university level. Such disdain for catechesis among theological thinkers makes sense if catechesis is understood as nothing more than a form of elementary indoctrination into Catholic faith. Yet John Paul II's *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT), emerging out of the Synod of Bishops held in October 1977, offers a robust understanding of catechesis, one related to the eucharistic approach to evangelization described above. Though there is some overlap between *Evangelium Nuntiandi* and *Catechesi Tradendae*, it is profitable for defining a liturgical theology for the new evangelization to treat one particular facet of this document related to evangelization: the christocentric nature of catechesis as foundational to the transformation of human experience, a pedagogical claim embodied most perfectly in the liturgical life of the church.

Before treating this theme, I should first note how this document approaches the relationship between catechesis and evangelization. Defining catechesis, John Paul II writes, "catechesis is an education of children, young people and adults in the faith, which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life."⁵ Importantly, the ministry of catechesis is systematic in scope, yet necessarily emerging from a deeper encounter with Christian faith through the initial proclamation of the kerygma, through preaching, through Christian life, the sacraments, and witness. For this reason, catechesis is perceived as one moment in the larger ecology of the church's mission of evangelization; it is a moment of maturation, following initial proclamation.

Of course, the document recognizes that the pastoral reality of the day means that catechesis often ends up fulfilling a variety of moments in the church's ministry of evangelization. Those who are to receive catechesis are many times marginally connected to the church, baptized but never catechized, or catechized so poorly that they are not yet capable of entering more deeply into the mystery of Christ (CT 19). In such instances, catechesis must necessarily involve itself "not only with nourishing and teaching the

faith but also with rousing it unceasingly with the help of grace, with opening the heart, with converting, and with preparing total adherence to Jesus Christ on the part of those who are still on the threshold of faith” (CT 19).

As a privileged moment of evangelization, catechesis may stand as a part for the whole, providing a more systematic understanding of the task of evangelization. At the very heart of catechesis, according to the document, is Jesus Christ:

The primary and essential object of catechesis is, to use an expression dear to Saint Paul and also to contemporary theology, “the mystery of Christ.” Catechizing is a way to lead a person to study this Mystery in all its dimensions. . . . It is therefore to reveal in the Person of Christ the whole of God’s eternal design reaching fulfillment in that Person. It is to seek to understand the meaning of Christ’s actions and words and of the signs worked by him, for they simultaneously hide and reveal his mystery. Accordingly, the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only he can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity. (CT 5)

When the document affirms that Christ is the center of catechesis, it means something more nuanced than the person and works of Jesus are central to a catechetical curriculum. Catechesis is a sacramental activity, one in which the catechist uses words and signs, including his or her own person, to point toward the reality of God. Catechists are to offer their words, their teaching, their very selves, allowing them to become not simply personal expressions of doctrine or the Scriptures, but an iconic glimpse into the self-giving love of the Father and the Son; an act of teaching in which the Holy Spirit comes to dwell among us. For this reason, the christocentricity of catechesis already points toward a liturgical or doxological encounter with Christ: “This teaching is not a body of abstract truths. It is the communication of the living mystery of God” (CT 7).

To a certain extent, the claim that catechesis involves an encounter with Christ may sound rather unsurprising to the contemporary reader. Yet, what is meant by John Paul II when he states that the final end of catechesis is communion with Christ? Turning to *Redemptoris Hominis*, written shortly before *Catechesi Tradendae*, one discovers why John Paul II places so much emphasis on catechesis as a transforming encounter with the mystery of God in Christ Jesus. He writes:

The Church's fundamental function in every age and particularly in ours is to direct [our] gaze, to point the awareness and experience of the whole of humanity towards the mystery of God, to help all . . . to be familiar with the profundity of the Redemption taking place in Christ Jesus. At the same time [our] deepest sphere is involved—we mean the sphere of human hearts, consciences and events.⁶

Jesus Christ is not simply an exemplary model of human conduct; rather, in Christ Jesus, humanity comes face-to-face with the love of God poured out for the salvation of the world. Catechesis is the art of systematic amazement, one in which humanity ponders the depths of divine love through concentrated attention to Christ's life manifested in the church's ministries of proclamation, of liturgy, of service, and prayer. This divine revelation does not deny our humanity, forcing us beyond time and history. The church's catechesis is necessarily humanistic, committed to a sober imagining of the possibilities of what our common humanity might become in Christ. In fact, the church is the very humanity of Christ working in the present day. Jean Mouroux, commenting on this aspect of the church, states:

Just as Christ's humanity was once visible as the efficacious sign of the mystery of salvation, so the Church has its own humanity as the efficacious sign of the same saving mystery. Christian existence is essentially spiritual, being based on an *esse spirituale*, grace; but, as communicated to human beings by the God-Man, it comes to us by way of the body, and is made effective in us by means of signs. The divine agape was first communicated through Christ's Humanity; it is now communicated through the Humanity of the Church.⁷

The christocentric nature of catechesis is not simply a declaration that, indeed, Jesus Christ is the central figure of Christianity. Christocentricity is a robust affirmation that catechesis is an unfolding of the divine mystery of redemption, one that takes place in *this day*. The process of redemption includes all that it means to be human, precisely because the central concern of catechesis is to enter into communion with the Word made flesh. Catechesis is evangelical insofar as it "aims therefore at developing understanding of the mystery of Christ in the light of God's word, so that the whole of a person's humanity is impregnated by that word" (CT 20). The imagination, the intellect, the deepest desires of the human heart come to be understood in light of the divine love revealed in Christ.

Implicit to this understanding of catechesis as a moment of evangelization is an approach to liturgical prayer as an evangelical ministry of the

church. As the document states, “catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity, for it is in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, that Christ Jesus works in fullness for the transformation of human beings” (CT 23). Liturgical prayer contributes to the catechetical, and thus evangelical, mission of the church not because it offers a pedagogically effective way of teaching complex doctrines or acquainting Catholics with the basic narrative of the Scriptures. Liturgical prayer is the very divine-human exchange, which the catechetical ministry of the church hopes to deepen through systematic instruction. As *Sacro-sanctum Concilium* (SC) makes clear, the liturgy of the church (especially the Eucharist) “is supremely effective in enabling the faithful to express in their lives and portray to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true church” (SC 2). Liturgical prayer is an encounter with the very reality of Christ, the God-Man who elevates our human nature to divine life.

Thus, *Catechesi Tradendae* prescribes a doxological form of catechesis, whereby the Christian slowly assimilates the mystery of Christ into a way of life through a systematic instruction that is transformative of human experience. This assimilation into the christological mystery is essential to the evangelical nature of catechesis, whereby each particular human being, and thus slowly each culture is impregnated by the Word. In John Paul II’s description of catechesis as christocentric, we have already begun to contemplate the liturgical task of evangelization. Liturgical prayer is the living of Christ’s own life, the mystery of divine self-gift taking place through the offering of orations to the Father, through the marking of time in the liturgical year, through stained glass windows, and incense rising above altars. The very mystery of Christ wonderfully contemplated in catechesis, is even more remarkably written upon the human body through liturgical prayer.⁸

General Directory for Catechesis

The *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC) is a mature summation of the church’s thinking about evangelization, specifically related to catechesis. Nonetheless, as will become obvious, the document provides further evidence (albeit underdeveloped) that the liturgical life of the church is integral to the work of evangelization. Because of the document’s consideration of liturgical education within the sphere of evangelization, I will devote some attention to it before treating more fully a liturgical theology of evangelization drawn from *Sacro-sanctum Concilium*.

The *General Directory for Catechesis*, published in 1997, is an updating of an earlier document (*General Catechetical Directory* [1971]). In this earlier

directory, the topic of evangelization receives scant attention. Where the document mentions evangelization, it presents it solely as a preliminary task to catechesis.⁹ By the time of the *General Directory for Catechesis*, evangelization was no longer relegated to a preparatory phase for systematic catechesis. Instead, the ministry of catechesis is located squarely within the domain of evangelization. Drawing from the Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*), the Directory notes:

God, in his greatness, uses a pedagogy to reveal himself to the human person: he uses human events and words to communicate his plan; he does so progressively and in stages, so as to draw ever closer to man. God, in fact, operates in such a manner that man comes to knowledge of his salvific plan by means of the events of salvation history and the inspired words which accompany and explain them.¹⁰

Divine revelation is structured pedagogically. God, like a master pedagogue, uses signs and deeds to reveal to humanity the divine plan for all of existence. Evangelization, employing this very same divine pedagogy, “transmits Revelation to the world . . . brought about in words and deeds. It is at once testimony and proclamation, word and sacrament, teaching and task” (GDC 39). In fact, the document provides a comprehensive description of evangelization as including “proclamation, witness, teaching, sacraments, love of neighbor: all of these aspects are the means by which the one Gospel is transmitted and they constitute the essential elements of evangelization itself” (GDC 46). Simply, evangelization is concurrent with the entire mission of the church, one that seeks to embody a life of love that transforms the temporal order; to bear persuasive witness to the way of life characteristic of Christianity; to initiate into Christian faith through catechesis, the sacraments, and maturation in Christian communal life; to foster communion among the faithful through the catechetical and sacramental ministries of the church; and to flame the desire for mission within the world (GDC 48). The stages of evangelization, as the document recognizes, are fluid and may include:

missionary activity directed toward nonbelievers and those who live in religious indifference; initial catechetical activity for those who choose the Gospel and for those who need to complete or modify their initiation; pastoral activity directed toward the Christian faithful of mature faith in the bosom of the Christian community. (GDC 49)

Yet, the fundamental goal of evangelization is the same in each of the stages: the renewal of the human race, of culture, of all existence in light of the

Gospel, of a revelation that is proclaimed, celebrated, and lived through visible signs and deeds.

Catechesis, though not reducible to evangelization, is integral to each stage of evangelization, including first proclamation, Christian initiation, ongoing formation into faith, and Catholic schools. It seeks to promote a living encounter with Christ, one that opens one up to a participation in the triune life of God (GDC 98–99). The directory emphasizes the christocentric and trinitarian nature of all catechesis, even more so than *Catechesi Tradendae*. The Directory comments:

Following the pedagogy of Jesus in revelation of the Father, of himself as the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, catechesis shows the most intimate life of God, starting with his salvific works for the good of humanity. The works of God reveal who he is and the mystery of his inner Being throws light on all of his works. It is analogous with human relationships: people reveal themselves by their actions and, the more deeply we know them, the better we understand what they do. (GDC 100)

This paragraph is important enough that it deserves further attention. The catechist contemplates salvation history precisely as manifesting the interior life of God. This act of contemplation results in a transformation of our own humanity—a realization of what it means to be human in light of the pedagogy of faith. Consider for a moment the fact that Jesus Christ, fully God and fully human, dies upon the cross and is then resurrected. When the catechist teaches this doctrine, immersing the student into the intricacies of salvation history, he or she is not simply proclaiming a historical fact. The catechist is inviting the student to participate in the life of God, in an act of contemplative learning; to perceive anew with wonder that the very root of all existence, the Creator of the world, has entered into the fullness of the human condition, offering himself in love unto the end. Nothing is more transformative, nothing more humanizing than such a doctrine.

And importantly in this act of teaching, of immersion into Christ's life as embodied in doctrine, we learn that to become divine is not to give up our humanity, to radically separate Christian life from life in general, precisely because it is the Word made flesh that offers our humanity, our history, our temporality as a gift to the Father. The document makes clear that “the human and social implications of the Christian concept of God are immense” (GDC 100). Recently, on the feast of the Ascension, Pope Francis preached regarding Christ:

He always forgives us, He is our advocate, He always defends us. We must never forget this. The Ascension of Jesus into heaven then reveals to us this reality that is so comforting for our journey: in Christ, true God and true man, our humanity was brought to God; He has opened the passage up for us, He is like a leader at the head of the rope when you scale a mountain, who has reached the summit and draws us up to Him, leading us to God. If we entrust our lives to Him, if we let ourselves be guided by Him we are sure to be in safe hands. In the hands of our Savior, our advocate.¹¹

It is the humanity of Christ, visible in the wounds that still mark his resurrected and ascended body, which transfigures every facet of our existence into an offering of God. The couple that welcomes a newborn infant comes to know Christ ever more deeply, as their own sense of wonder, of exhaustion, of terror at being parents is offered up to the Father in love. The middle-aged man who receives a diagnosis of a terminal illness comes to know Christ as he gives himself over to the reality of the shortness of life, of physical relationships that come to an end. The marginalized, those who are ignored by church and society alike, enter into Christ's very life as they seek divine love even in the faces of those who mutilate their humanity. We gaze at Christ, we contemplate his humanity, precisely because in Christ we come to know that the only way to be human is not to grasp, to hang on at all costs, to consume until the last drop, but to give all of our existence away in love.

While the *General Directory for Catechesis* fundamentally deals with the catechetical ministry of the church, it also addresses (at least in a very partial manner), the relationship between liturgical prayer and evangelization. Liturgical homilies, the sacraments of Christian initiation, and eucharistic communion are all integral to the process of evangelization in the church (GDC 48). Yet, the document treats liturgical formation most fully when turning to an elucidation of the fundamental tasks of a catechesis centered in evangelization. Quoting the entire text that deals with the liturgical task of catechesis:

Christ is always present in his Church, especially in "liturgical celebrations." Communion with Jesus Christ leads to the celebration of his salvific presence in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist. The church ardently desires that all the Christian faithful be brought to that full, conscious, and active participation which is required by the very nature of the liturgy and the dignity of the baptismal priesthood. For this reason, catechesis, along with promoting a knowledge of

the meaning of the liturgy and the sacraments, must also educate the disciples of Jesus Christ “for prayer, for thanksgiving, for repentance, for praying with confidence, for community spirit, for understanding correctly the meaning of the creeds,” as all of this is necessary for a true liturgical life. (GDC 85)

Note that central to the liturgical task of catechesis is promotion of *full, conscious, and active participation*, intrinsic to the very nature of liturgy and the dignity of those who are baptized. The end of liturgical formation is nothing less than the creation within each Christian of a *habitus*, a disposition dedicated to living a liturgical life. In fact, the pedagogy of divine-human exchange, in which the wonders of that divine life in Christ are knit into the human life, are especially important since “in the liturgy, all personal life becomes a spiritual oblation” (GDC 87).

Thus, implicit in the document (although never fully developed) is the function of liturgical prayer within the broader contours of evangelization. If evangelization is the transformation of all human existence, all human culture, in light of the Gospel, then nothing is more important to the evangelical mission of the church than those liturgical rites that enable us to offer our humanity to the Father through the Son in the unity of the Spirit. Indeed, if one is to propose a critique of the church’s recent documents on evangelization, these documents are not clear enough regarding the “evangelical” nature of the liturgy.

A Liturgical Theology of Evangelization: *Sacrosanctum Concilium*

When giving talks in parishes, dioceses, or universities on liturgical renewal in the church, I am often asked the following question: How can we increase full, conscious, and active participation in our parish? The pastor or liturgy director is drawing on one of the key ideas from the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, a phrase that the German liturgist Josef Jungmann called the refrain of the council.¹² Yet, I always have a hard time answering the question precisely because this document was not simply interested in rallying assemblies to sing with more vigor, to sign up liturgical ministers *en masse*, and to perform gestures with the appropriate level of dramatic flair. Instead, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* sought to foster a renewal of the entirety of Christian life, a deeper understanding of what it means to be the church pilgriming in the world: “From the very beginning the revival of the liturgy went hand in hand with the renewal of the concept of the Church. If such a

picture of the Church is grafted on the hearts of the faithful by rendering accessible to them such a liturgy, they will be much better equipped to act in the world as Christians.”¹³ Indeed, although the proper grammar was not available at the time the document was composed, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* situates the liturgical prayer of the church within the domain of evangelization as described above. While a wholesale treatment of the document is not possible, I want to focus on five features of this document relevant to evangelization: the location of liturgy within the broader narrative of salvation; the prominence of the paschal mystery in the text; the ecclesiological vision offered by the document; the claim of liturgy’s function as glorifying God and sanctifying humanity through signs; and lastly, a closer examination of what is meant by full, conscious, and active participation.

Liturgy and Salvation History

Even a hasty reading of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* results in a rather stunning insight: a document on liturgy begins not with a discussion of liturgical ritual, of where the various liturgical actors should stand, or even of the history of liturgical prayer itself. The document commences with a vision of liturgy as a participation in salvation history: “For the liturgy, through which ‘the work of our redemption takes place,’ especially in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, is supremely effective in enabling the faithful to express in their lives and portray to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true church” (SC 2).¹⁴ Christian liturgy is not mere ceremony; it is not the production of rituals appropriate to specific settings. When someone proclaims that a University of Notre Dame football game is a liturgical event, such a person has missed the essence of Christian worship. In the liturgical rites of the church, each person participates in the salvific activity of the triune God, who has unfolded his love through the ages. The liturgy, as Cyprian Vagaggini notes, “is nothing else than a certain phase of revelation, a certain way in which the meaning of revelation is realized in us.”¹⁵

That liturgical prayer is a participation in the unfolding of the narrative of salvation is a stunning claim. When my infant son was baptized, as the priest blessed the waters, as the acclamation of the assembly rained down upon him, as water was poured over his head, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were invoked, he slept. In the midst of his sleep, he entered into the communion of the church, of those of us marked with the sign of the cross. His history, so short, is now part of that larger narrative whereby

God created the cosmos as an act of love; whereby he nurtured our ungrateful hearts through the tender mercy he bestowed upon Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; whereby he saved his people from the slavery of Egypt, softening their hardened hearts as he pilgrimed with Israel through the barrenness of a desert he restored to life through manna from above; whereby in the fullness of time, God sent his only Son to reveal to us that power and prestige are but shadows compared to the reality of a life of total, self-giving love. The narrative of salvation, continually unfolding in the liturgical rites of the church, becomes our own through participation in the liturgy. My son's entire life, his eating and sleeping and gazing with total wonder upon every source of light, is fertile ground for the enfleshment of the Word.

Thus, redemption is not simply an intellectual possibility for the Christian. As Yves Congar comments, the salutary quality to liturgical prayer "is not only taught to us or merely brought to our notice; it is celebrated, realized, rendered present and communicated, not simply as a doctrine or truth, but as a reality."¹⁶ Liturgy is a privileged performance of evangelization, one in which our humanity comes to experience the reality of God through visible signs.

Liturgy and the Paschal Mystery

In fact, the document as it moves forward says even more about our participation in salvation history through liturgical prayer. There is, perhaps, no more important concept in the document than that of the paschal mystery, mentioned for the first time in article 6 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.¹⁷ What is meant by the term paschal mystery? Quoting Jungmann:

The term *paschale mysterium* describes . . . the expression "mystery of Christ" . . . the real kernel of the Christian order of salvation: the act with which Christ has redeemed us and which is continued in the saving activity of the Church. Like the *pascha* of the Old Testament, it is a remembrance of God's redeeming acts of salvation, the presence of salvation and the promise of the consummating future. It underlines at the same time the basic triumphant Easter character, which is of the essence of Christianity, of the work of the Church, its message and salvation.¹⁸

Importantly, the term is not new but is drawn from Odo Casel's *The Mystery of Christian Worship* (1932).¹⁹ A closer reading of this text enables one to see that the paschal mystery is not only shorthand for describing the death

and resurrection of Christ; but instead it is a term essential to grasping the evangelical function of the liturgy.

Casel's work, albeit integral to the development of the liturgical movement, is in reality a response to a disillusionment of the religious imagination. At the beginning of the text, he writes:

It is usual nowadays to talk a great deal about the brotherhood of nations and service to humanity; but behind all this there is not that deeper love which is a sharing in the very love of God himself, his *agape*, but instead the self-divinization of mankind, which sees in itself the god it means to worship. Community means nothing except individuals lumped in a mass, joined together for the sole purpose of fighting off, by their collective weight, any power which might make a claim to rule over them: a spectacle of brute power.²⁰

All of life, according to Casel, has become disenchanting. We view the world as subatomic particles and governmental power grabs. At the same time, religion can easily be reduced to a series of dogmatic propositions, on one hand, or “a more or less emotionally toned attitude towards ‘The divine,’ which binds itself to no dogmatic or moral system whatever,” on the other.²¹ But Christianity is not a religion in either of these senses. Christianity is a “mystery,” “a deed of God's, the execution of an everlasting plan of his through an act which proceeds from his eternity, realized in time and the world, and returning once more to him its goal in eternity.”²² Through the mystery of Christianity, humanity is invited to return to the Father, back to the totality of divine love that was our origin before the fall.

The fullness of this mystery is revealed in Christ, specifically in his sacrifice upon the cross. Casel writes:

At the mid-point of the Christian religion . . . stands the sacred *Pasch*, the passage which the Son of God who appeared in the flesh of sin, makes to the Father. The pasch is a sacrifice with the consecration of the person that flows from it; it is the sacrifice of the God-man in death on the cross, and his resurrection to glory: it is the Church's sacrifice in communion with and by the power of the crucified God-man, and the wonderful joining to God, the divinization which is its effect.²³

The sacrifice of divine love, revealed in Christ's self-gift upon the cross, is that very same sacrifice that the church enacts in her rites, in her liturgical worship.²⁴ And as the humanity of Christ—embodied in the church—offers this worship together with the Son, then our very humanity is made divine:

“the time from the ascension to the parousia has this meaning: to reproduce in individuals the fact of Christ, the mystery of Christ, to enter into his mystery, to be absorbed by it.”²⁵

Often, the problem with such theological claims is that they are difficult to see when one moves to the level of the concrete, the particular. I have attended a slew of eucharistic liturgies in which rather than “divinized,” I have been sent forth dumbed, dulled, and disordered. But for a moment, consider a Sunday assembly and the sheer range of human affections, desires, and narratives included there. A widow enters the sanctuary, devastated by the loss of her husband. A soon-to-be high school graduate is overjoyed by news that he has been accepted to the university of his dreams. Many couples enter this assembly worried about the burden of bills and the fearful possibility of losing a job. When the eucharistic prayer is offered, these joys and desires, these sorrows and disappointments become part of that sacrifice of praise offered by the priest and assembly alike. Our entire selves are joined to Christ’s sacrifice to the Father, as we give ourselves away in prayer in response to the God who first loved us. And if we recognize what our humanity has become through this prayer, if we can see that every aspect of ourselves is part of this gift, then we come to know our responsibility to offer that return-gift of love to the neighbor: “Here we can see the full human import of the radical newness brought by Christ in the Eucharist: the worship of God in our lives cannot be relegated to something private and individual, but tends by its nature to permeate every aspect of our existence.”²⁶

Thus, the very nature of the paschal mystery is that which draws us out of ourselves, returning us to the love of Father revealed in Christ, a love inspired by the Spirit that seeks to echo throughout the cosmos and history alike. The paschal mystery is, for this reason, more than shorthand for the death and resurrection of Christ. It is the pedagogy of the liturgy in which our humanity is lifted up to the Father through Christ. The paschal mystery, celebrated in the liturgy, is at the heart of every act of evangelization.

Liturgy and the Church

Although *Sacrosanctum Concilium* is often treated for its liturgical vision, it has recently been argued that it is the preeminent ecclesiological document, pertaining to the very nature of the Church.²⁷ How so? Quoting the text:

the church is both human and divine, visible but endowed with invisible realities, zealous in action and dedicated to contemplation, present in the world, yet a migrant, so constituted that in it the human is directed toward and subordinated to the divine, the visible to the invisible, action to contemplation, and this present world to that city yet to come, the object of our quest (see Heb 13:14). The liturgy daily builds up those who are in the church, making of them a holy temple of the Lord, a dwelling-place for God in the Spirit (see Eph 2:21-22), to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ (see Eph 4:13). (SC 2)

The church is not a bureaucracy, a sociological entity alone. In the church's actions, it is the invisible Christ and his Spirit who works through visible means. The church offers the liturgy in conjunction with the sacrifice of Christ, thus participating in Christ's self-gift upon the cross. Words are spoken, hymns are sung, prayers are chanted, human affections are raised to the living God, and in each case, they are accepted by the Father through the sacrifice of Christ the mediator.

It should be noticed that the document at no point presents the celebration of the liturgy as the sole responsibility of the priest. Instead, "liturgical services have to do with the whole body, the church. They make it visible and have effects on it. But they also touch individual members of the church in different ways, depending on ranks, roles and levels of participation" (SC 26). The church, after Christ the liturgist, is the principal liturgical actor.²⁸ And the rites of the church are not the private affairs of prelates or liturgical committees but celebrations of the Body of the church, which visibly, audibly, and tangibly manifest the identity of the church as a sacrament of unity (SC 26).

In fact, the liturgy is the most sacred of the church's activity, not because everything else the church does is peripheral to the formation of disciples, but because

the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed; it is also the source from which all its power flows. For the goal of apostolic endeavor is that all who are made children of God by faith and Baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of his church, to take part in the sacrifice and to eat the Lord's Supper. (SC 10)

There is a kind of strangeness to this claim. As the fathers of the Second Vatican Council noticed about this passage, is not the ultimate end of the

Christian life love, peace, unity of will?²⁹ Is the goal of apostolic endeavor really liturgy? Of course, as the reader would recognize by now, these questions in fact reflect a false dichotomy. The liturgy of the church sacramentally expresses, through visible signs, that unity of love that all of humanity is called to through Jesus Christ.

Again, rather than remain at the level of theological abstraction, it may be useful to turn to the concrete. In the context of present-day American life, there are numerous ways that we are unified, becoming one in a common mission or purpose—sometimes against our wills. Attending an NFL game, for example, is a unifying experience, one in which the pulsating music, the chants of the crowd, the joyance of reveling in a violent hit or a brilliant pass from a franchise quarterback gathers a stadium of strangers together in a common purpose. Of course, such unity is not peaceful; it is a form of self-worship whereby a city or community delights in its accomplishments, in its own glories, in its own self-worth (implicitly against the “other guys”). Christian liturgy is distinct from this. It is not a violent, forced gathering of those marked by the sign of the cross. It is not a form of self-worship, whereby we praise God for choosing a people as worthy as us. Liturgical prayer reveals an ecclesiology of gift, of gratitude,³⁰ whereby the Body of Christ, the People of God, the Temple of the Holy Spirit is unified, not by its own efforts, by the folly of force, but by the pacifistic gift of a God who loved unto the end. As Joseph Ratzinger writes:

Only a power and love that is stronger than all of our own initiatives can build up a fruitful and reliable community and impart to it the impetus of a fruitful mission. The unity of the Church, which is founded upon the love of the one Lord, does not destroy what is particular in the individual communities; rather, it builds them up and holds them together as a real communion with the Lord and with each other. The love of Christ, which is present for all ages in the Sacrament of his Body, awakens our love and heals our love: the Eucharist is the foundation of community as it is of mission, day by day.³¹

Liturgical prayer, exemplified in the eucharistic liturgy, is the summit and font of ecclesial identity because in this prayer, we are slowly made one by the love of Christ, a divine love that heals our disordered affections. Such a love does not erase difference; it is not a banal unity of the same. Yet, the church’s liturgical worship does reveal the destiny of all humanity whereby we will be made whole, one, a single gift of love offered to the Father “integrated by the Spirit of the Lord into the communion in which

the totality of what is human—with its differences, its diversity, its joys, and its sorrows—has become one with Christ Jesus in the *agape* of the cross and resurrection.”³²

Thus, the church’s liturgy is a matter of evangelization because it both signifies and makes real that unity of love, of self-gift, which is the destiny of all of humanity in Christ. The church emerges forth from its act of worship, its members enlightened by communion with the Lord, seeking to offer this gift of self to each person they encounter. A gift of love that is not controlling, that does not reduce difference to a facile unity. Such love, such gift of self to the world seeks a unity made possible only in the love of God poured up generously in the liturgical rites of the church. A church that does recognize its evangelical mission to the world has not yet grasped the depths of love manifested in its worship.

The Glorification of God and the Sanctification of Humanity through Signs

Thus far we have treated the theological—and, as it turns out, evangelical—foundations of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Liturgical prayer is a participation in salvation history, the offering of every facet of our humanity to the Father as an act of love, one that results in our passage through Christ to divine life. Such prayer is not simply individualistic but seeks to unify all of humanity into a single sacrifice of love to the Father, embodied in the divine-human life of the church. Yet how do the liturgical rites of the church make this possible? How is a particular individual, who attends the liturgy, inspired to such self-giving love? *Sacrosanctum Concilium* clarifies this point. Quoting the text:

The liturgy, then, is rightly seen as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. In the liturgy the sanctification of women and men is given expression in symbols perceptible [*signa sensibilia*] by the senses and is carried out in ways appropriate to each of them. In it, complete and definitive public worship is performed by the mystical body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and his members. (SC 7)

This paragraph of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* requires closer attention, precisely because the text includes a key insight into the pedagogy of liturgical prayer. In fact, two functions of liturgy (the glorification of God and the sanctification of women and men) are united together through the concept of “symbols” or perhaps a better translation “sensible signs” (*signa sensibilia*).

For the sake of clarifying the function of liturgy in the church's mission of evangelization, it will be important to grasp the theological import of the term "sensible signs," as well as how these signs enable humanity to glorify God and to enter into a process of sanctification.

Why is there an emphasis in the passage on sensible signs? Commenting on liturgy as a complex of sensible signs, Cyprian Vagaggini writes:

under the veil of the sign, of any sign, the reality of the thing signified is reached, and that the reality reaches us through this sensible veil because there is a certain real, though partial, identity between the sign and the reality signified. We must understand that the sign is the bridge over which our encounter is made with the invisible reality and this reality is made present to us, even if that encounter and that presence are always very imperfect because the sign can never contain and transmit all the wealth of the invisible reality which is expressed in it. Only if we have a lively sense of all this are we predisposed for entering the world of the liturgy.³³

Sacrosanctum Concilium takes this insight, drawn from sacramental theology, and applies it to the liturgy as a whole. Liturgical prayer consists of a myriad of sacred signs, all of which refer to the reality of divine love manifested in Christ and now communicated through the church. For example, consider the assembly. The gathering of the people of God for divine worship is not akin to a club, who decides it would be helpful for the sake of group cohesion to meet at least once a week. Rather, "for one who knows how to see through the veil of the sign, it is a convocation, an *ekklesia*, of God in Christ Jesus, an assembling 'in the name' of Christ."³⁴ Liturgy includes a host of such signs ranging from speech, gestures, elements and objects, liturgical art, and persons.³⁵

Importantly, this pedagogy of signification operates on a variety of levels. According to Vagaggini, signs have four dimensions: they are demonstrative, obligating, commemorative, and prophetic.³⁶ The demonstrative dimension of a sign points toward invisible, sacred realities—those theological foundations of the liturgy described above.³⁷ A stained glass window, depicting Catherine of Siena, is a demonstrative sign insofar as the light that illumines the colored glass produces within us a delirious delight, an elevating of our imaginations for a moment to consider the God who is the light seeking to illuminate every member of the assembly into a luminous icon of sanctity. Yet, every sign is also obligating, a moral sign remanding a new way of being in light of our interaction with the sign.³⁸ Continuing

with the example of a stained glass window, the Christian who perceives the beauty of God's own light cannot remain complacent, pleased with his or her enjoyment of the window. Instead, the Christian must ask oneself, am I an effective medium for allowing the light of divine love to manifest itself even now? Do I perceive in my neighbor a visible sign of God's own light? Further, every sign in liturgy is commemorative, pointing toward that narrative of salvation fully revealed in Christ but already operative since the time of Adam.³⁹ Again, the stained glass window brings the entire assembly back to the moment of creation in which light first illuminated the chaos, while also presenting to the assembly an image of St. Catherine who has become a mirror for us seeking to contemplate God's own light spilling out into history. Lastly, liturgical signs are prophetic, pointing toward "heavenly glory and of the worship in the future Jerusalem."⁴⁰ Our example of a stained glass window is once again an apt one. For in our contemplation of a church bathed in the refracted light of these windows, we glimpse momentarily the very essence of the God who is for us the light that knows no darkness.

This four-fold signification is essential to grasping how the liturgy sanctifies humanity, how it glorifies God. Again quoting Vagaggini:

In the concrete liturgical reality, the action of God who sanctifies and the response of the Church who renders her worship to God are closely intertwined and cannot in fact be separated, being like two correlative and indivisible aspects of one and the same reality. The ultimate reason for this is the intimate copenetration of the divine action and the human response in the work of man's sanctification and of worship.⁴¹

Every liturgical action of the church is the concrete, incarnational, and sacramental manner in which God bestows to humanity grace upon grace, gift upon gift. The concrete, bodily signs of the liturgy enable humanity to participate in God's own life as our imaginations, our desires, every facet of our being is infused with sanctifying grace. Simultaneously, the liturgy of the church is a proper glorification of the living God, the church carrying out that most just action of adoration. The church does not glorify God abstractly, as disembodied souls who like to think pleasing thoughts about the triune God. As the church carries out its duty of worship through sacred signs, signs that form and renew our imaginations, we are sanctified, divinized, returned to our vocation as creatures made in the image and likeness of God.⁴²

What does this have to do with evangelization? Simply, the use of sacred signs to glorify God in liturgical prayer and sanctify humanity is already an

act of evangelization. Our voices, our artistic creations, our affections and desires are knit into the unfolding plan of divine love as we ourselves participate in worship. We become worshippers, adorers of the living God, capable of participating in God's own life. The signs that we engage with in liturgical worship are to incarnate themselves into every part of our lives, not simply individually but as a social group. Members of the Body of Christ, the visible church, must seek to become all that we receive in worship. By no means is this sanctification automatic, magical, or immediate. As *Sacrosanctum Concilium* makes clear, "in order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds be attuned to their voices, and that they cooperate with heavenly grace lest they receive it in vain" (SC 11). But to the community that gives itself over to the liturgical rites of the church with such dispositions, liturgical prayer is that pedagogy of God whereby every facet of culture, every aspect of society, every individual body and desire is lifted up in love to the Father through immersion into sacred signs that glorify and sanctify.⁴³

Full, Conscious, and Active Participation

Having considered the theological foundations and pedagogical principles of liturgical prayer, we may now return to that famous refrain of the Second Vatican Council:

It is very much the wish of the church that all the faithful should be led to take that full, conscious, and active part in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, and to which the Christian people "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people" (1 Pet 2:9, 4-5) have a right and to which they are bound by reason of their baptism. (SC 14)

By now, it should be obvious that full, conscious, and active participation is not simply encouraging parishes to a frenetic, external performance of rites. It does not mean that everyone in the parish is constantly performing gestures, speaking, singing, and making noise. Rather, this participation includes immersion of our imaginations, our very bodies, into the salvation history that liturgical prayer unfolds; it is a participation that culminates in our being taken up into the paschal mystery of Christ, one in which as we give our humanity over to the Father, we become divine; it is a participation in the church, a community that finds its source not in its own ideas, its own theories, but in the efficacious love of God healing the wounded heart

of individual and society alike; it is a participation in sacred signs, which serve as concrete ways that our humanity slowly practices the art of self-giving love through the glorification of God. For this reason, full, conscious, and active participation is necessarily external and internal, the speaking of concrete words that lead us to contemplate and become that love of God for the salvation of the world.

It is perhaps for this reason that I have such a difficult time advocating “best practices” for parishes to promote full, conscious, and active participation. It is not simply a matter of increasing external activity, offering guides for what the various symbols of worship mean, of improving microphone systems, or finding the right music that everyone can sing. These are important facets of liturgical worship. But it is not enough. As Joseph Ratzinger writes:

True liturgical education cannot consist in learning and experimenting with external activities. Instead one must be led toward the essential *actio* that makes the liturgy what it is, toward the transforming power of God, who wants, through what happens in the liturgy, to transform us and the world.⁴⁴

The Christian faithful must slowly learn, through the art of self-giving love made possible through the mystery of the liturgy, to allow external participation (the speaking of words, the participation in a procession, the singing of a hymn) to become an internal gift of self to God and neighbor alike.⁴⁵ To really mean what it is that we pray; to bring the sacrifice of our lives to the altar as a eucharistic offering of love; to mark ourselves with the sign of the cross no longer in a perfunctory way but as a commitment that our body might become an icon of Christ’s own self-gift for the world.

The externals are essential. Liturgical participation cannot be reduced solely to silent contemplation if this deeper internal participation is to be made possible. Signs matter, and for this reason, the remainder of *Sacro-sanctum Concilium* is taken up with a reform of the liturgy “in order that the Christian people may be more certain to derive an abundance of graces from it” (SC 21). But the promotion of full, conscious, and active participation cannot simply focus on externals. It must foster within the Christian the proper dispositions to participate in liturgical prayer in a way that results in a transformation of each individual, of the history of humanity, of the cosmos itself. In this way, the promotion of full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical prayer is nothing less than a privileged way of evangelizing.

In this chapter, I offered a liturgical theology within the domain of the church's understanding of evangelization. I first defined evangelization as the transformation of humanity through the particulars of the Gospel. Evangelization is not a sectarian or violent persuasion of others to join the church. Instead, it is an imaginative activity in which the church proposes a vision of what humanity can become when we give ourselves over to the prodigal love of the triune God. Evangelization is the very mission of the church, and it has been defined most fully in documents that treat catechesis.

In the second part of this chapter, I turned to the liturgical theology inscribed in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* to discover a robust understanding of how liturgy is itself integral to evangelization. Liturgical prayer invites the faithful to knit their own narrative into salvation history; to participate in the paschal mystery of Christ; to become a sacrament of unity through the church—one that serves as an icon of peace for all the world; to become sanctified and divinized through the glorification of God through sensible and sacred signs. Full, conscious, and active participation in the sensible signs of liturgical prayer results in the re-creation of our desires, our imaginations, and ultimately our very will. Every facet of our humanity (both individually and socially) is elevated to divine life, and we emerge forth from such prayer committed to the transformation of the world, having become practiced in the art of self-giving love.

Thus, liturgical prayer is integral to the church's mission of evangelization. The promotion of full, conscious, and active participation is pivotal to the ongoing mission of evangelization. Yet in the last several years, a new term has entered into ecclesial parlance: "the new evangelization." It is to the treatment of this term that I now devote my attention.