



MASS CLASS 101

**LITURGIA:
Definition & Elements**


Etymology: liturgy comes from the Greek word *leitourgia* (*leitourgia*). The prefix *leit-* comes from the Greek word *laos*, which means people/public (note: this is where we get the word “laity”). The suffix *-ourgia* comes from the Greek word *ergon*, which means work/service (note: this is where we get the word “energy”). So, Liturgy is “public work” or “work of the people.”

Definition: the Catholic Church has come to understand this term in light of the Christian mysteries. “Liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed” (SC 10). “Through the liturgy Christ, our redeemer and high priest, continues the work of our redemption in, with, and through his Church” (CCC 1069). So, what exactly is the liturgy? Three nuances help us to understand its true meaning:

- **Nuance I:** *the work of the people*. This nuance comes more from etymology of the word. It is the idea that the liturgy is a celebration: something we participate in and something that we do. It involves the active participation of the faithful in God’s work of salvation.
- **Nuance II:** *the work of Christ done on behalf of the people*. Jesus Christ (the God-man) does the work of salvation for the people because they are unable to do this work on their own. Man fell to sin in the beginning because he turned away from God and listened to the lies of the serpent (Satan). Throughout salvation history, man has been trying to atone for this original sin (especially by means of animal sacrifices and food offerings); however, man was incapable of reconciling himself with God because he is both a sinner and imperfect. God will not make up for our sins because he did not do anything wrong. God could forgive man of his sins; however, justice demands that man suffers the consequence of his sins, which is death. So, in his divine mercy, God sends his Son, who is both God and man (in all ways but sin). He dies, takes on the consequences of human sin, liberates us from the power of the serpent, and gives us new life. In the liturgy, the Holy Spirit makes present to humanity Christ’s work of our redemption.
- **Nuance III:** *the work of the people imitating God* (or the worship of God through imitation). Throughout history, people worshiped their “gods” by imitation. For example, in Greek culture, a person would worship Dionysus, the god of wine, by drinking wine. They would also worship Poseidon, the god of the sea, by fishing. In the liturgy, we worship God imitating his mercy, forgiveness, and salvation through sacred actions and words. Through liturgical imitation, God transforms man into instruments of his love.

Elements of Liturgy: Sacred Time, Sacred Space (places & directionality), Sacred Articles (objects, vessels, & vestments), Sacred Art (music & images), and Sacred Actions.