

Our hope for heaven



ON November 1, 1950, Pope Pius XII declared a divinely-revealed dogma of the church, pronouncing that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory. With that, an ancient belief became Catholic doctrine and the Assumption was declared a truth revealed by God.

The **Catechism of the Catholic Church (1966)** defines the Assumption as: "Finally the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all stain of original sin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, so that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and conqueror of sin and death."

In **975**, the **CCC** says: "We believe that the Holy Mother of God, the new Eve, Mother of the Church, continues in heaven to exercise her maternal role on behalf of the members of Christ."

Origins of the feast

Writing for EWTN Global Catholic Network, Father Clifford Stevens describes the Assumption as the oldest feast day of Our Lady.

He writes: "Its origin is lost in those days when Jerusalem was restored as a sacred city, at the time of the Roman Emperor Constantine (c. 285-337). By then it had been a pagan city for two centuries. For 200 years, every memory of Jesus was obliterated from the city, and the sites made holy by His life, death and resurrection became pagan temples.

a place of pilgrimage. (Today, the Benedictine Abbey of the Dormition of Mary stands on the spot.)"

What the Assumption means to Catholics

The Assumption completes God's work in Mary since it was not fitting that the flesh that had given life to God Himself should undergo corruption. It is God's crowning of His work as Mary ends her earthly life and enters eternity. The feast turns the eyes of all Catholics in that direction, where we will follow when our earthly life is over.

What the Assumption is not

Some people think Catholics believe Mary "ascended" into heaven. That's not correct. Christ, by His own power, ascended into heaven. Mary was assumed or taken up into heaven by God. She didn't do it under her own power.

Day of obligation

Today this solemnity is a day of obligation and although the Assumption falls on August 15, it is celebrated this year on Sunday, August 14. The church is known to shift the date for pastoral reasons and to facilitate maximum participation.

"After the building of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in 336, the sacred sites began to be restored and memories of the life of Our Lord began to be celebrated by the people of Jerusalem. One of the memories about His mother centred around the Tomb of Mary, close to Mount Zion, where the early Christian community had lived.

"On the hill itself was the 'Place of Dormition', the spot of Mary's 'falling asleep', where she had died. The 'Tomb of Mary' was where she was buried. At this time, the 'Memory of Mary' was being celebrated. Later it was to become the feast of the Assumption.

"For a time, the 'Memory of Mary' was marked only in Palestine, but then it was extended by the emperor to all the churches of the East. In the seventh century, it began to be celebrated in Rome under the title of the 'Falling Asleep' (Dormition) of the Mother of God. Soon the name was changed to the 'Assumption of Mary', since there was more to the feast than her dying.

"What was clear from the beginning was that there were no relics of Mary to be venerated, and that an empty tomb stood on the edge of Jerusalem near the site of her death. That location also soon became

Happy Birthday Mother Mary!

THE feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary marks the birthday of our Blessed Mother. It has been celebrated since at least by the 6th century by the Eastern Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. The feast spread to Rome in the 7th century, but it was a couple more centuries before it was celebrated throughout the West.

The traditional date of the feast, September 8, falls exactly nine months after the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary.

Scripture does not give an account of Mary's birth. However, the Protoevangelium of James, an apocryphal gospel written about 150AD, fills in the gap. This work has no historical value, but it does reflect the development of Christian piety.

According to this account, Mary's parents Anna and Joachim are infertile but pray for a child. They receive the promise of a child who will advance God's plan of salvation for the world. Such a story (like many biblical counterparts) stresses the special presence of God in Mary's life from the beginning.

The word "apocrypha" means "things put away" or "things hidden" and comes from the Greek through the Latin. The general term is usually applied to the books that were considered by the church as useful, but not divinely inspired.

A commentary in the AmericanCatholic.org website notes that "next to the birth of Jesus, Mary's birth offers the greatest possible happiness to the world. Each time we celebrate her birth we can confidently hope for an increase of peace in our hearts and in the world at large."



An Italian painting depicting the birth of the Virgin Mary. In the lower part the newborn Mary is washed; in the upper part St Anne in bed, immediately after childbirth.

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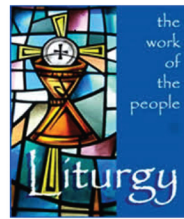
To be a
**worshipping,
welcoming & caring** community

成为一个敬拜、欢融与关怀的团体

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What is Liturgy?

LITURGY is an "action" of the whole Christ (Christus totus). Liturgy means the participation of the People of God in "the work of God": Through the Liturgy, Christ, our redeemer and high priest, continues the work of our redemption in, with and through His Church.

"Where two or three are gathered in my Name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20)

In the New Testament the word "liturgy" refers not only to the celebration of divine worship but also to the proclamation of the Gospel and to active charity. In a liturgical celebration the Church is servant in the image of her Lord, the one "leitourgos", she shares in Christ's priesthood (worship), which is both prophetic (proclamation) and kingly (service of charity).

Liturgical services are not private functions but are celebrations of the Church which is "the sacrament of unity", namely, the holy people united and organised under the authority of the bishops.

The liturgy then is rightly seen as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. It involves the presentation of man's sanctification under the guise of signs perceptible by the senses and its accomplishment in ways appropriate to each of these signs. In it full public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and his members. From this it follows that every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the priest and of His Body which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others. No other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree.

In summary, Liturgy is the source of the Church's prayers, actions and the summit by which our lives and all our ministers ascend to the Father. Liturgy includes all seven sacraments, the Liturgy of the Hours and all celebrations of the Liturgical Year. Liturgy moves the faithful to be one in holiness and draws the faithful into the compelling love of Christ and sets them on fire.

Who celebrates the Liturgy?



THE celebrating assembly is the community of the baptised who, "by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, that through all the works of Christian men they may offer spiritual sacrifices". This "common priesthood" is that of Christ the sole priest, in which all His members participate.

But "the members do not all have the same function." Certain members are called by God, in and through the Church, to a special service of the community. These servants are chosen and consecrated by the sacrament of Holy Orders, by which the Holy Spirit enables them to act in the person of Christ the head, for the service of all the members of the Church. The ordained minister is, as it were, an "icon" of Christ the priest. Since it is in the Eucharist that the sacrament of the Church is made fully visible, it is in his presiding at the Eucharist that the bishop's ministry is most evident, as well as, in communion with him, the ministry of priests and deacons.

For the purpose of assisting the work of the common priesthood of the faithful, other particular ministries also exist, not consecrated

by the sacrament of Holy Orders; their functions are determined by the bishops, in accord with liturgical traditions and pastoral needs. "Servers, readers, commentators, communion ministers and members of the choir also exercise a genuine liturgical function."

In the celebration of the sacraments it is thus the whole assembly that is leitourgos, each according to his function, but in the "unity of the Spirit" who acts in all. "In liturgical celebrations each person, minister or layman, who has an office to perform, should carry out all and only those parts which pertain to his office by the nature of the rite and the norms of the liturgy."

"Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious and active participation 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,' have a right and an obligation by reason of their baptism."

Liturgy is celebrated through.....

Signs & Symbols

A sacramental celebration is woven from signs and symbols. In keeping with the divine pedagogy of salvation, their meaning is rooted in the work of creation and in human culture, specified by the events of the Old Covenant and fully revealed in the person and work of Christ.

Signs of the human world In human life, signs and symbols occupy an important place. As a being at once body and spirit, man expresses and perceives spiritual realities through physical signs and symbols. As a social being, man needs signs and symbols to communicate with others, through language, gestures and actions. The same holds true for his relationship with God.

God speaks to man through the visible creation. The material cosmos is so presented to man's intelligence that he can read there traces of his Creator. Wind and darkness, wind and fire, water and earth, the tree and its fruit speak of God and symbolise both His greatness and His nearness.

In as much as they are creatures, these perceptible realities can become means of expressing the action of God who sanctifies men, and the action of men who offer worship to God. The same is true of signs and symbols taken from the social life of man: washing and anointing, breaking bread and sharing the cup can express the sanctifying presence of God and man's gratitude towards His Creator.

Signs of the covenant The Chosen People received from God distinctive signs and symbols that marked their liturgical life. These are no longer solely celebrations of cosmic cycles and social gestures, but signs of the covenant, symbols of God's mighty deeds for His people. Among these liturgical signs from the Old Covenant are circumcision, anointing and consecration of kings and priests, laying on of hands, sacrifices and above all the Passover. The Church sees in these signs a prefiguring of the sacraments of the New Covenant.

Signs taken up by Christ In His preaching, the Lord Jesus often makes use of the signs of creation to make known the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. He performs healings and illustrates His preaching with physical signs or symbolic gestures. He gives new meaning to the deeds and signs of the Old Covenant, above all to the Exodus and the Passover, for He Himself is the meaning of all these signs.

Sacramental signs Since Pentecost, it is through the sacramental signs of His Church that the Holy Spirit carries on the work of sanctification. The sacraments of the Church do not abolish but purify and integrate all the richness of the signs and symbols of the cosmos and of social life. Further, they fulfil the types and figures of the Old Covenant, signify and make actively present the salvation brought by Christ, and prefigure and anticipate the glory of heaven.

Words & Actions

A sacramental celebration is a meeting of God's children with their Father, in Christ and the Holy Spirit; this meeting takes the form of a dialogue, through actions and words. Admittedly, the symbolic actions are already a language, but the Word of God and the response of faith have to accompany and give life to them, so that the seed of the Kingdom can bear its fruit in good soil. The liturgical actions signify what the Word of God expresses: both His free initiative and His people's response of faith.

The liturgy of the Word is an integral part of sacramental celebrations. To nourish the faith of believers, the signs which accompany the Word of God should be emphasised: the book of the Word (a lectionary or a book of the Gospels), its veneration (procession, incense, candles), the place of its proclamation (lectern or ambo), its audible and intelligible reading, the minister's homily which extends its proclamation, and the responses of the assembly (acclamations, meditation psalms, litanies and profession of faith).



Singing & Music

"The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as a combination of sacred music and words, it forms a necessary or integral part of solemn liturgy." The composition and singing of inspired psalms, often accompanied by musical instruments, were already closely linked to the liturgical celebrations of the Old Covenant. The Church continues and develops this tradition: "Address . . . one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart." "He who sings prays twice."

Song and music fulfil their function as signs in a manner all the more significant when they are "more closely connected with the liturgical action," according to three principal criteria: beauty

expressive of prayer, the unanimous participation of the assembly at the designated moments, and the solemn character of the celebration.

The harmony of signs (song, music, words and actions) is all the more expressive and fruitful when expressed in the cultural richness of the People of God who celebrate. Hence "religious singing by the faithful is to be intelligently fostered so that in devotions and sacred exercises as well as in liturgical services," in conformity with the Church's norms, "the voices of the faithful may be heard." But "the texts intended to be sung must always be in conformity with Catholic doctrine. Indeed they should be drawn chiefly from the Sacred Scripture and from liturgical sources."



Holy Images

The sacred image, the liturgical icon, principally represents Christ. It cannot represent the invisible and incomprehensible God, but the incarnation of the Son of God who has ushered in a new "economy" of images:

Previously God, who has neither a body nor a face, absolutely could not be represented by an image.

But now that He has made Himself visible in the flesh and has lived with men, I can make an image of what I have seen of God . . . and contemplate the glory of the Lord, His face unveiled.

Christian iconography expresses in images the same Gospel message that Scripture communicates by words. Image and word illuminate each other:

We declare that we preserve intact all the written and unwritten traditions of the Church which have been entrusted to us.

One of these traditions consists in the production of representational artwork, which accords with the history of the preaching of the Gospel. For it confirms that the incarnation of the Word of God was real and not imaginary, and to our benefit as well, for realities that illustrate each other undoubtedly reflect each other's meaning.

All the signs in the liturgical celebrations are related to Christ: as are sacred images of the holy Mother of God and of the saints as well. They truly signify Christ, who is glorified in them. They make manifest the "cloud of witnesses" who continue to participate in the salvation of the world and to whom we are united, above all in sacramental celebrations. Through their icons, it is man "in the image of God", finally transfigured "into his likeness", who is revealed to our faith. So too are the angels, who also are recapitulated in Christ:

Following the divinely-inspired teaching of our holy Fathers and the tradition of the Catholic Church (for we know that this tradition comes from the Holy Spirit who dwells in her)

we rightly define with full certainty and correctness that, like the figure of the precious and life-giving cross, venerable and holy images of our Lord and God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, our inviolate Lady, the holy Mother of God, and the venerated angels, all the saints and the just, whether painted or made of mosaic or another suitable material, are to be exhibited in the holy churches of God, on sacred vessels and vestments, walls and panels, in houses and on streets.

-- Sources: <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/catechism/index.cfm?recnum=3651>;
http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2s1c2a1.htm; Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium; Catechism of the Catholic Church; General Instruction of the Roman Missal.