

WHAT IS 'LITURGY'?

You have probably heard the word 'liturgy' being used at church, but have you ever thought about what it means? It's not an easy or quick answer to give. To begin to define what a liturgy is, we have to look at what we do in a liturgical celebration, and at what the liturgy does in us.

Our idea of 'liturgy' actually has roots in the ancient Greek concept of *leitourgia*. For the Greeks, *leitourgia* referred to any public works that were done for the good of the people. (In modern times, garbage collectors and mail carriers are examples of *leitourgia*.) Early Christians adopted the idea of *leitourgia* to describe the work that Jesus performed during His time on earth, especially the Paschal Mystery (Jesus' Suffering, Death, and Resurrection) by which the human race was saved. Eventually, *leitourgia* became *liturgy*, the continuation of Jesus' work through the public prayer of the Christian Church.

There are many liturgical celebrations in the Church today. The liturgy that people think of first is the Mass. Other liturgies include the celebration of any of the Sacraments (either with or without the Eucharist), the Liturgy of the Hours, and many more public celebrations by the Church. The defining characteristic shared by each is the revelation of an aspect of the Paschal Mystery at the centre of the celebration.

When we participate in a liturgy, we are not simply remembering or re-creating the Paschal Mystery. Instead, the Paschal Mystery is made present, so that the work Jesus accomplished 2000 years ago is happening today. By participating in the liturgy, we are joining ourselves to Jesus in the sacrifice of the Paschal Mystery. Sanctified by our worship, we are then sent into the world to bear witness to the mystery of Christ. The Liturgy has been called "the summit and source" of Christian life. The way in which we live the Christian virtues in our everyday lives - at work, at home, and at school - directs us back to the liturgies of the Church. And it is by celebrating the liturgies that we are strengthened to go back into the world, to live as Christians and to build up the Body of Christ.