

# Joy and Hope in Christ: Vatican II

Part 8 in a series

April 29, 2012

This year, 2012, marks the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, which began on October 11, 1962, and closed on December 8, 1965. Throughout the year, we'll mark this milestone anniversary by celebrating the Council, and exploring its teachings through bulletin inserts, lectures, and a variety of special events.

## Renewing the Liturgy

As we have seen, the liturgy was the first topic tackled in the Council debates, beginning in October, 1962. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, also known as *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, was the first document passed by the Council Fathers and approved by Pope Paul VI, on December 4, 1963. So what was decided? What does the Constitution actually say?

**The liturgy is all about the paschal mystery** of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection, a mystery in which we are all immersed by our baptism in Christ and our sharing in the Eucharist. "The Church has never failed to come together to celebrate the paschal mystery: reading those things 'which were in all the scriptures concerning him,' celebrating the eucharist in which 'the victory and triumph of his death are again made present.'" (CSL 6)

**Christ is present in the liturgy in various ways:** "He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister... but especially under the Eucharistic species. By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes. He is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them'" (CSL 7).

**The liturgy is the most important thing we do as the people of God.** Through our participation in the liturgy, we express our faith and are formed into the Body of Christ. "The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows. For the aim and object of apostolic works is that all who are made sons 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." (CSL 10) We celebrate the liturgy to be sent forth and evangelize the world, that more and more people may come to the table and give worship to God.



**The participation of the people really matters: it is both our right and our duty.** It is not enough to follow the rubrics, though that is important. "When the liturgy is celebrated, something more is required than the mere observation of the laws governing valid and licit celebration; it is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects" (CSL 11). The participation of the people becomes the guiding principle for the reforms of the liturgy. "Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as

a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people, is their right and duty by reason of their baptism. In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else." (CSL, 14) An obvious first step is the use of the vernacular rather than Latin. (CSL, 38)

These basic principles of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy are reflected in the liturgical reforms which were carried out in the years following the Council by the Consilium, a group of bishops from around the world appointed by Pope Paul VI, and assisted by scholars from many nations. These are some of the accomplishments of the Consilium in bringing the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy to life:

- Clarification of the Mass and other rites, on the principle of "noble simplicity" (CSL 34)
- Development of the Lectionary for Sundays and weekdays—in the course of three years, we hear virtually all of the New Testament, and a good portion of the Old
- Restoration of the catechumenate and development of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)
- Reform of the liturgical year, removing feasts of non-historical saints, and keeping the focus on the Paschal Mystery of Christ
- Reform of funeral rites are to be reflections of the paschal mystery, the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ
- Sacred music, art and architecture should reflect both the great tradition and foster and encourage contemporary artists.

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