



Opening Question:

How do you express your relationship with God?

There's an old adage. If you want to know everything about a subject, ask six questions: who, what, when, where, how, and why? In light of these questions let's consider our worship. We know who to adore: God. We know what we do. We worship as a community, an activity we call "liturgy." We know when and where to worship him: on Sundays at our local church. But how do we worship? We partake in the sacraments, signs of God's presence among us. Why do we worship, especially in sacraments? We could point to our traditions. This is the way the Church has always worshiped. But there is a deeper reason. Sacraments are the way we celebrate the Paschal Mystery.

Why? The Paschal Mystery

The Paschal Mystery is the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus. The word Paschal comes from the Greek word "Pascha" that means Passover. Jews celebrate the feast of Passover every spring. It reminds them about their ancestors' passage from slavery in Egypt to freedom. Christians focus on the passage of Jesus from his passion and death to eternal life, a life he shares with us. That even began at the Last Supper, a Passover meal where Jesus shared bread and wine with his disciples. But he gave this simple food and drink a new significance. Instead simply remembering a moment of liberation in the life of a nation, he infused them with his very presence. The bread and wine became his body and blood. So, it is through signs like bread and wine, water and oil, that the Risen Christ makes himself known to his followers.

How? Sacrament

The Church uses the term "sacrament" to describe the presence of Christ in and through signs. We can define the term "sacrament" as an outer sign with



an inner reality. The word came from the Latin "sacramentum" which was a sacred oath that sometimes had a physical bond to insure its fulfillment.

For us Christians, sacraments use outward signs of bread and wine, water and oil, to reveal the inner reality of God working in our lives. In a sense, Christ himself is a sacrament. He is the outward sign that reveals the presence and activity of the Father.

The Church has seven sacraments, outward signs that reveal the presence of the Risen Christ to us his followers. They also reveal God working in our lives. They show us God's gift of faith. For the way we pray and worship is the way we believe. Sacraments are some of the ways God saves us right now. While the bishop or priest might baptize or celebrate the Mass or perform one of the other sacraments, it is actually Christ who does these things. The bishop or priest simply represents Christ to the community.

Sacraments also point to our life with God forever. St. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth about the Eucharist:

Whenever you eat this bread and drink from this cup together, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he returns from heaven.

1 Corinthians 11:26

What? Liturgy

Sacraments are celebrations of the community. They are liturgy, a word that means “work of the people.” Because we are social beings, we depend upon language, gestures, actions to communicate our thoughts and intentions. God does the same with us. He used signs and symbols to reveal himself and his plans to his people. So, sacraments are liturgy.

While they are the work of God’s people, their source is God himself. Through the liturgy, we Christians fully realize the Father’s blessing that we find in Christ. Through the liturgy, the Risen Christ is present to us. Because he still carries the wounds of his death in his glorified body, the reality of his sacrifice on the cross is still present right here with us. At the same time, his presence gives us a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy we will celebrate in glory.

Through the liturgy, the Spirit reminds us of God’s activities throughout time. When we hear the Old Testament readings at Mass, the Spirit invites us to see the progress of God’s people that points towards the arrival of Christ. When we hear the New Testament readings at Mass, the Spirit invites us to recall the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and realize he is present with us. During the Eucharistic Prayer at Mass, the celebrant prays the Spirit will come down so the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. Through the Spirit, Christ is made manifest to the community and unites its members into his Body.

Who? The Worshiping Community

Whenever two or three believers gather together to pray in my name, I am there with them.

Matthew 18:20

When we gather together to worship, Christ is present. In fact, he leads us in prayer as the head of his body. But, while we all partake in the liturgy, we need someone to represent Christ. This is the role of the ordained minister either the bishop or his representative, a priest. They proclaim the gospel, preach a homily, pray for the descent of the Spirit on the bread and wine, say the words “This is my body” over the bread and “This is my blood” over the wine.

Others who are not ordained can also assist in the liturgy as readers, Eucharistic ministers, and musicians.

When? Church Calendar

When do we worship God? For almost two millennia, the Church has set aside Sunday as the day Christians worship. It’s not the Sabbath but it does carry the obligations to worship and rest because it is the day of the Resurrection.

Along the same lines, the Church celebrates Easter as the preeminent feast above all others. The liturgical or church year developed out from Easter. At first, there was a time to prepare for Easter we call Lent and a time to celebrate its significance we call Easter time. The feast of the Incarnation, Christmas, also has a time of preparation we call Advent and a time to celebrate called Christmas time. The periods between the preparation and the celebration of these two feasts, we call Ordinary Time. These do not refer to seasons that are normal or average. Instead, the Sundays are marked with whole or “ordinal” numbers.

The Sunday church calendar contains a three year cycle of Gospel readings. Cycle A uses readings from Matthew.. Cycle B from Mark and Cycle C from Luke. John’s gospel is interspersed over the three year cycle.

Finally, there is a cycle of celebrations for weekdays outside of Sunday. We call this the Sanctoral cycle. It includes saints days and special feasts. It has its own list of readings.

Where? The Local Parish

God is found in the Spirit. The faithful must worship him in the Spirit and in truth.

John 4:24

As Christians, we can praise God anywhere. Yet, we construct church buildings not only for worship. We build make the notion of Christ’s Body, the Church, tangibly present. It is THE place for prayer, for worship, and for an encounter with God. Thus, it must have furnishings for the celebration of sacraments.

- A baptismal font.
- A lectern for the Liturgy of the Word.
- An altar for the Liturgy of the Eucharist.
- A seat for the celebrant.
- A tabernacle for the reservation of consecrated hosts.
- A collection of sacred oils for sacraments.
- A room for the sacrament of reconciliation.

Above all, it must create a warm space that invites visitors into the presence of God.

We call ourselves Christians not only because we follow the teachings of Jesus. We identify with a community that worships God. When we gather for liturgy we enter into the presence of Christ. He communicates his life, death, and resurrection to us through signs and symbols, words, gestures and actions we call sacraments. There is time on Sundays and a place we call a parish church for worship. We have ordained leaders to not only celebrate worship. Christ works through them as his representatives to make his presence and activity tangible. By the power of the Spirit, we worship together with and in and through Christ to the glory of God the Father.

Closing Question:

Who? What? When? Where? How? Why? Which of these questions is the most important to you in your prayer relationship with God?

Reference to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraphs CCC 1077-1134 and 1163-1173.

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