

Now the first thing we want to say about liturgy is **liturgy is prayer**. What is prayer but the lifting of the mind and heart to God? Now this is so obvious that we forget about it, and I think that we often think about Mass as thanksgiving, to express our gratitude to God, to listening to the word of God to gain wisdom, and that's all true. But first and foremost, let's say we go to liturgy because it is prayer and it's prayer of our community; it is not only prayer of us as individuals. It's a prayer of the community. But **prayer requires the lifting up of the heart and mind to God**.

Now in our minds or souls there are **three different levels of attention**. The first is **non-attention**. This is the level by which we do things mechanically by habit. It is impossible to pray mechanically. That's why Jesus said, "Do not rattle on like the pagans." So that isn't praying. It's rattling on; it is not prayer.

Now the second level of attention, perhaps you could call it the **feeling level or the emotional level**. This level is what is the whole point of dramas, theater, entertainment, television, literature. It's to draw your attention to it, okay—to draw your attention to it. This is also not prayer. **Prayer does not draw your attention**.

In prayer **you have to bring your attention to the prayer**. So it is based on **your own choice, your will to be attentive**. In the Eastern rite before the gospel the priest sings, "Wisdom, be attentive." So attention is absolutely essential; so we have to bring our attention. Now this is something we often don't quite realize. So we think: well, we will go to Mass and—and what? Perhaps be entertained. But, no, we have to go to Mass to bring our attention, to lift our minds to God, to lift our souls to God, our hearts to God. So it is in that way it belongs to the genus of work. It is a work of the spirit. So **prayer is work; liturgy is work**. In fact, the word *liturgia* means "work of the people." Literally that's what it actually means—work of the people. The work is coming and paying attention, which is called—that's what is meant by full participation. It doesn't mean simply singing. It's good if you sing. But **paying attention is the first and foremost form of participation**.

So having said that, we will go on to what is peculiar about the biblical idea of prayer and worship because, after all, we think of ourselves as having evolved over a long period of time from the basis of Scripture. **Catholicism and Christianity in general is really rooted in the experience of people centuries ago**, millennia ago, starting with Abraham. So we can talk for a few minutes about Abraham.

Now **Abraham and Sarah** were a couple who experienced the gratuitous intervention of God in their lives—gratuitous intervention. As it were, out of the blue God chose to give them a child, even though it was out of the course of nature. Sarah was too old; they tried for years. Now this was a blessing. And the idea of a blessing is a gift. So **God gave them a gift, and the point is that Abraham responded**. So did Sarah—she laughed, which is good because it shows you that there's humor involved too. Well, what is

laughing about? It is about seeing the incongruity of the whole thing. And, of course, it was laughable. But, on the other hand, it was nonetheless true.

Now you see her counterpoint in the New Testament, **Mary**, not laughing, but accepting—**not understanding, but accepting**. So we want to see a **correlation between the couple Adam and Eve**, which of course are fictional characters; they are not actually real people, but they represent the first couple or the earliest origins of human life. Then you have **Abraham and Sarah** and then you have **Joseph and Mary**. These are three different couples that respond to an offer. **Adam and Eve respond negatively to the offer of partnership**. And they replace partnership, the possible partnership, with rivalry. That's actually the meaning of the story of the fall; the eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is really **a rivalry has been set up between the couple and God**. They are no longer partners. And this causes a completely sad development that takes place within the human race. And God tries to bring a new opportunity to Abraham, and Abraham accepts. Sarah does too after she laughs.

Now as soon as God gives Abraham and Sarah what they have always wanted, God says, "Now I want him back." So that the promise to be a blessing follows the fact of the blessing. But in order to be a blessing Abraham has to also give something of himself. And he responded positively to that too—rather remarkably. But of course God doesn't really want Isaac back; he simply wants Abraham's willingness to give. That's the important thing—his willingness to give. **Because of this willingness then Abraham is confirmed as a blessing for all times and in his posterity many nations will be blessed**. We have to keep in mind many nations—this is not all about Abraham and only his children. His responsibility if you read the Book of Genesis is to be a blessing for everybody.

This is the idea of covenant. **Covenant is a relationship between God and people, but it requires trust on behalf of the people**. They have to trust; they have to go along with this. And Abraham does in two ways: first of all in receiving Isaac, and then giving him up. So that established the idea of covenant. **Covenant is really the basis of worship because in covenant we have a gift which is gratuitous; in worship we have the remembering of the covenant and the remembering of what God has done and therefore the claiming of membership within the covenant and therefore identity**.

We could say one reason why we worship is to claim our identity as children of Abraham. And you know when this idea of being a blessing is when Jesus said, "He is a true son of Abraham," he means he knows his role is to be a blessing. We just see in the whole Scriptures the history of the people, the way the history is decided and remembered is precisely to keep in mind the idea that somebody always does keep in mind the role of being a blessing. **In every generation there is somebody who is a blessing**. Not all—sometimes just a couple, but **it is through memory**. And **it's capitalized through liturgy**.

If you look at the Hebrew idea of time, this is unique. The Hebrews introduced into the world an idea of time that was nonexistent before them. Time meant the past, present, and future, and all three are alive. In modern times people have really accepted the linear

idea of time but only the present. To us modern people, only the present is real. But **in the Hebrew idea the past is kept alive by remembering it**, which is all what covenant is about and worship is about. **Worship is about keeping in mind, keeping in mind what God has done so that we can be part of it and we become present to it in the recital.**

So early Jewish, Israelite, worship was a matter of reciting. And that was the first role of the priest. The priest was not to be involved in sacrifices, that was not the original role. The **original role of the priest was to remember the history**. History is story—his story, and that was his role to keep it in mind. So **by being in touch with what has gone before we can become part of it, and then we can become the blessing**. And presumably the blessing will spread like the sand on the shore, as many grains as there are of sand on the shore so will be the posterity of Abraham, but the posterity is the blessing of Abraham—not taken necessarily in a physical sense, which of course St. Paul did not take in a physical sense. He saw how this had to be taken spiritually. Now that was one of the problems with some Jewish people who took it only physically, but that's not really in agreement with the beginning of it, because in the beginning it was supposed to be a blessing for everybody.

Now as we move on in the history we get to **another real watershed event which is exodus**. Now exodus is predicated on the idea that the Hebrew people, probably *Apiru* people, are in bondage in Egypt. Now are these really all relatives of Abraham? Probably not, probably not. Probably what happens is that many people—*Apiru* probably means “landless peasant”—so the **landless peasants are now in forced labor in Egypt**. But some of them remember the covenant with Abraham, and **they call out to God for deliverance**. And deliverance is forthcoming, and we have the exodus.

Now at Sinai we have a renewal of the covenant, but that's not the origin of the covenant; it's a renewal **because God remains faithful to his promise to Abraham**. As more people join in—now the whole idea that Isaac had two boys and one had twelve sons, you know the story: Jacob had twelve sons supposedly, and each one became a separate tribe—extremely unlikely. That's not the way things happen. Your children have entered your family, so they are all part of your tribe. They don't start their own tribe. So probably what this means is that **many other people wanted to be part of this, and they could if they joined the covenant**. So we see, especially in Joshua, we see cases where they are actually celebrating apparently somebody coming in and agreeing to the covenant.

Now some people think it's always the same people renewing the covenant—probably not—probably new people were coming in saying we want to be part of this too; we want to be part of the blessing of Abraham. And if you read, then of course twelve became, you might say, the magic number—you know, twelve is the magic number; twelve became the number. But if you read very clearly the different descriptions, the names of the tribes are not always the same. There are always twelve, but they don't all have the same names. What does this mean? It was a **flexible situation**. Twelve is important and symbolic for both the same reasons. **Twelve is important for the apostles because there are twelve tribes**. Why are there twelve tribes? I don't know why there were twelve, but there were twelve. But presumably there was an openness to any number of tribes, and in

fact, after the time of Christ many Arab tribes did join into and became part of the Abrahamic covenant, and many of them were enemies of the other Arabs, which is one reason why there is such enmity between Jews and Muslims, because of that moving into the Abrahamic covenant. Now the Muslims do not understand themselves as descendants of Abraham in the same way; they understand their descendance through Ishmael.

So when we have the **exodus** now, which is now the **watershed event of liberation**, of freedom, which is a response of the fidelity of God, now **we are going to celebrate that too**. So what happens is that the **ancient festivals of unleavened bread and paschal lamb are transformed**. Apparently lambs have seasonal fertility, so in spring they start having their baby lambs, the sheep have baby lambs. So they celebrate it. It was a blood rite. The blood was used to ward off evil spirits. And **that rite was transformed into a recital, a moment of worship of remembering the exodus event**.

And what happened in the genius of the Jewish mind, they not only used the words, the recitals, the poems, the stories, but **they started using the actions too**. So the taking up of bread, the **eating of unleavened bread** became part of the story, and the **sharing of the lamb became part of the story**, and the roasting of the lamb became part of the story. And this is how the Jews developed what is called the “Seder.” The Seder was really a meal, the original meal, and it is a way in which this whole identity is maintained through the ages, so that actually through the Seder **everybody that shares in the Seder becomes part of this past event**. They become part, they are—literally, in their mind, literally—at the exodus. And the Jewish people continue to recite this annually. They didn’t repeat them on a weekly basis. **By at the time of Christ then they had started to develop a purely verbal form of worship and remembrance called the “synagogue service,”** and then they would do that every Friday. So they did start to develop a weekly type of worship, which is based on the same idea but very simple. But, again, it’s always **strengthening membership, identity, remembering and being part of something that is in the past, but the past remains alive**.

Now the past is not the whole story either. **The biblical focus is really on the future because God is the Creator and he is not finished**, although that was disputed of course. When some of the early stories of the creation were finished the impression was now everything is done. And some rabbis even used that as a reason for the sabbath rest because, after all, God rested because he was finished—now we are going to rest. Not only that, but this is used as a way of explaining or justifying, you might say, the condition of the world: if people were sick, well, God wanted them to be sick—God is finished. When Jesus came he disputed those interpretations. He said God is not finished. It is not God’s will for people to be sick, and I’m going to show you what God’s will is: “Get up and walk; receive your sight.”

So as then the Christians now come into—well, first of all, **Jesus** himself, let’s say, **was constantly transforming the covenant idea**. But what he was really doing was showing what it means to be a son of Abraham, what it means to be a blessing. **He was living out the promise to Abraham**. In a certain way we should not avoid looking at Mary as well, because Mary was the one who took Abraham’s role in that stage of salvation history. She is the one who agreed, as Abraham had agreed, to be blessed. So

we go from Adam and Eve—rivalry; Abraham and Sarah—companionship and agreeable acceptance, trust, and even sacrifice. Then we go to Joseph and Mary—Joseph is marginalized; he has very little to do. **Mary** is the one who almost, well, she is the one who **takes the offer of God and accepts it and becomes a blessing now for the whole world.**

But you see, as we see **in Christ the whole meaning of the identity of the covenant itself becomes expanded**, not at first even in his life. At first when the Syrophoenician woman came in he says, well, you know, “I have come to the lost sheep of Israel”—don’t bother me. She says, “Even dogs get to eat the scraps at the table.” Jesus says, “Your faith has saved you.” So even he changed his mind. And he continued to change the meaning of covenant.

So in his Seder Jesus gathers his disciples together. Not only twelve either, I am sure there was a roomful of people. He has a **Seder**, is now **going to be present at the exodus**, bringing them all into the presence of the Exodus, which is indirectly the presence also of Abraham at the beginning. Then he transforms that and **starts talking about the future.**

The future was very important for the prophets. For them history was on-going. There will be a time of fulfillment, and thus the **prophecy of fulfillment.** And this involves a **messianic expectation**, but it is vague. At first it seems to be so formulated in terms of their political past and in terms of Israel being a state, a nation. The Messiah would be the leader of a nation, and so on. But in Jesus that starts to change.

Now in the Seder, in the Seder of **Jesus’ own last days**, he **transforms the whole idea of covenant. “This is the new covenant in my blood.”** He seals it in his blood. Moses sealed the covenant in the blood of the lamb, but he is sealing it in his own blood. And he is talking about something and he is changing and transforming the whole idea of the future. It’s no longer a bright day in our future. It’s now not a day anymore. It’s now something beyond ordinary time. **It’s the eternal covenant, and it’s life with the eternal God, and that’s what he is offering, and he is sealing this offer in his blood.**

So Christians then take all of this and they transform it again into our liturgy, into a form of worship in which like the Jews they are remembering what God has done—now precisely what God has done in Christ and precisely how that all applies to their lives, but going back to Abraham all because and only when they trust. **If they don’t trust, then God won’t work because he can’t violate our freedom—he cannot violate our freedom. All forms of worship are calling people to remember and, therefore, to trust and, therefore, to become part of the blessing.**

Now we notice in the life of Jesus in his beginning ministry he stresses the idea of **repentance**, and that is really the idea of a new way of thinking. It’s translated poorly; we don’t have a good English word for it. **Metanoia, in Greek, means think in a new way.** So it’s already the beginning of the idea that there is something that is going to be happening that is, on the one hand, the result of the promise to Abraham but, on the other hand, is not within categories that we know at this time. I think that one of the things

about human beings is **we tend to get stuck in categories no matter what they are**. We are not stuck in the categories of Judaism, but we are stuck in our own personal categories. We just do; we grow into a sort of habitual way of thinking about it. And then we think, well, that's what reality is like. Reality is not like that. So when we are coming to worship we are really being recalled also to metanoia, to repentance. And that involves a certain also introspection. **How am I a blessing?** How have I been a blessing? How have I carried on to others the promises made to Abraham? How much a child of Abraham am I? Or how much children of Abraham are we—both? If you notice in the liturgy, **in the beginning of the liturgy, we do have this moment of examination**.

So let's go then to the actual idea of the Eucharist. **In the Eucharist now the Church gathers and we remember what God has done in Christ**, especially the gift Christ made of himself, which mirrors the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, but it's much deeper because it's himself. In a sense Isaac was a part of Abraham—true, but not in the same way. So this is then a new idea of what it means to sacrifice to God, offer to God. It's now oneself one sacrifices. And this explains why the prophets had gone through such a long tirade about sacrifice. God does not really want your sacrifice. He doesn't need your sacrifices. "If he were hungry he wouldn't tell you"—because the sacrifices were all in the form of food. That's naturally what it was.

The reason that people practiced **sacrifice** was—well, there was more than one reason. For one thing the sacrifice was considered a tax; it was a tax, a tithe; a tithe is a tax. Because you belong to this people now you owe your king his taxes. That was an original idea. **The firstfruits idea—that's a tax**.

Then the idea was when you kill an animal the animal's soul, which is the breath of God, will go back to God. **You can put upon that animal the petition**, the need or the want. Then, of course, Israel interacted with the pagan world. In the pagan world, I mean, sacrifices were barbecues. It's like, well, you go to the Jewel to get your meat, well, they went to the temple. That's about it. So everything got multiplied and multiplied and multiplied. And **often the sacred meaning was lost**.

So we see that Jesus has a dim view of this whole thing along with many of the prophets, a dim view of the idea of sacrifice, and perhaps even a dim view of the temple itself because when he went to pray he didn't go to the temple. He went to the Mount of Olives. Now there was a school of thought, apparently Malachi the prophet was part of it, that said that the **Shekinah of God departed from the temple** when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem and stole all of the vessels. The overshadowing left and went up to the Mount of Olives and **stayed on the Mount of Olives**, which is up the hill from the temple. So this little thought said that when the second temple came, it was restored under Nehemiah and Ezra, later on expanded by Herod, God didn't approve. The matter was disputed.

Now some believe Jesus himself was of the view that God didn't return to the second temple because, after all, what was going on there wasn't really true worship. It wasn't about being children of Abraham. It wasn't about being a blessing to others. It was a system of sacrifice, religious ritual. So when Jesus kicked out all the moneychangers in

the temple he was making a statement about the system, the sacrificial system. He was saying we don't need this. This is supposed to be "a house of prayer." He did not find it so. So when he prayed, he went to the Mount of Olives. Now **the night before he died he went to the Mount of Olives** as well. That's where he found God.

Now when we gather, we don't gather to do something public—that's not the idea; that's the temple idea. **The early Church tried to break from the temple tradition.** And understand then when the Church gathers it is not a sacred place. Liturgists have restored this idea of a sacred place; this was not the early Christian idea. In the Eastern Church they have a curtain—that's the temple idea, screen, separate people, separate what is holy from the people. That is not the **original Christian idea.** It was **gather around a table as Christ gathered** his friends around a table, **and remember, remember what God did.**

And what God did is not always a past tense, but it's the present tense since **we are present at it.** And because of Jesus transforming the idea of the future, their understanding of his presence is not simply his body that he offered on the cross. In one sense that is present, but it's also the body that rose from the tomb. It is the risen presence. **The risen presence is simultaneously in the community and with the Father.** In fact, he is the **mediator drawing us into relatedness with the Father.** So the **presence of Christ is the presence both of the Christ who died on the cross,** and we are present to that, but it's **also the presence of the Christ who rose from the tomb** and who is now with the Father and with us. So we encounter then the risen Christ. That's why in the Middle Ages they said: **"body, blood, soul, and divinity," meaning the whole living Christ.** That's why in the Eucharistic prayer it refers to "this a living sacrifice of praise." And I often point to the elements because we have said the elements are transformed by the Spirit into the living Christ. So it is the living Christ that is a living sacrifice of praise. **Christ is the living sacrifice of praise, and we are joined together with him. And therefore we are enabled to continue to be a blessing, if we trust.**

Now trust in the Christian sense is **not only trusting in the God of the past, but in the God of the future.** I would say actually if you understood Judaism that should have been true too, although maybe many of them didn't get it, but I think it's actually in the Old Testament as well, the whole tradition of the prophets, the importance of the future. **The future will be determined by your trust now.** There is no one single fate all set. That is not a biblical idea ever, not Old or New Testament. There is not one single fate all set which we just have to get used to. No, God is the God of all possibilities, and the possibilities that will actually work out depend on you—whether you trust in the benevolence of the God of Abraham, and choose to be a child of Abraham, and choose to be a blessing for others. If you do, then the future, at least your future, will be that blessing. But, sadly enough, we do have the power to reject the whole thing as did Adam and Eve. That is also part of our history, the **possibility of rejecting the offer.**

Now we do not believe that the whole world will ever reject the offer. We don't believe that is part of the possibility because somehow we believe that **God's presence will always be acknowledged by somebody.** That's the idea that **Jesus will stay with**

the Church until the end of time. The Church will never be completely wiped out. Were the Church completely wiped out, in a sense creation would be wiped out. There would be nothing more; I mean it could be rocks and earth etc, but couldn't be anything more of God because the Church is that which trusts in God.

So in Eucharist we come and all of this becomes part of our memory, and this is what **makes us who we are**, and this is what **gives us membership and identity** as a brother or sister of Christ, as a son or daughter of Abraham. The Eucharist is obviously based on the Seder, but it has been transformed again because of the way in which—first of all, it's not an annual feast. It's a weekly or daily celebration. And, of course, it was changed by history.

First of all, the first part of it, the word part, that was in part based on the synagogue service, but was transformed also by changing conditions. For example, during the time **when Christians were persecuted they couldn't all arrive at the same time** at any particular place. They had to come one at a time. So then the **liturgy of the word would be long**, long readings where people could slip in one at a time, one at a time, until they finally were enough that they stop reading and go on with the meal. But the idea was the same: it was to **remember**.

And if you go now into the **gospels**, what did the evangelists write? They wrote things that we need to look at because they **open up something**. Every single story is opening something. It's either a word of Christ attached to a view of life or a vision of life or it's about something he did which should relate then to how we should live or view or work or act. So **out of this whole idea of Seder and gesture comes the sacramental system really**. At all time, of course, **God remains always the faithful one**.

So as we remember what Jesus did and we accept him as our offering, we have nothing to offer to God that is not a gift. But we know that the greatest gift is Christ, so **we offer Christ**. Along with Christ we realize that **he has incorporated us into himself**. That is our Baptism. That's our incorporation into his reality. So as we offer him historically looking to the past, joining there, also looking to the future and to his "eternal oblation," as Hebrews calls it, at the throne of the Father, actually the mercy seat of the Father. The mercy seat is what is in the temple in Jerusalem behind the curtain; it is an empty seat; it's called the mercy seat, the kapporeth. That is where the priest went once a year on Yom Kippur to pour the blood that was offered for the forgiveness of sins, for the atonement of sin. So when Hebrews said there is a mercy seat in heaven, and that is where Jesus came with his own blood, Hebrews calls that the "eternal sacrifice." So when we join in then in that, **we join in both his intercession**, which is what that is, that's intercession, **and we join in the gift itself**. And as Augustine says through this action "the whole Christ offers the whole Christ to the Father." **We become both the offerer and the offering as we join in with Christ. But this can only mean something if we are really trusting that we will follow through, living as Christ lives and then receiving his life and his glory.**

Any questions or comments?

How to do it? How to get that attention?

Well, that's just a matter of working on it. All prayer forms, whenever you study **prayer form**, every single thing is about **attention**. Even yoga, yoga is all about attention—everything, asceticism. They are all forms of attention gathering, attention focusing—your centering prayer—everything, meditation, everything.

Understanding the concept that we are the offerer and the offering.

Because in **Baptism we are made one with Christ and we can't be separated now**. So as we offer Christ to the Father and he offers himself eternally we are part of that. We join it; through worship we become one with him, the head, but then we are also a member already through Baptism. That's why it says in the Third Eucharist Prayer: "that we may become an offering to you." **Each Eucharistic Prayer takes a different tack; they are not all the same**, if you notice. They **emphasize a different aspect of Eucharist** because it's very rich and complex. And in different eras in the Church some people think there is only one that is valid, so they just talk about that one all the time. One of the problems with Reformation was that the reformers said they valued the Eucharist but only as receiving the body of Christ. That's all they saw it as. They didn't see it as part of this remembering and identifying and membership and so on. They didn't see that. They had lost that. And that wasn't necessarily their fault; the Church had lost it. So that's why **renewal is a matter of getting in touch with the whole of the tradition and appropriating it**.

That's our sending out. *Ite, Missa est*. You are dismissed. **Go now and be the blessing**.

Jesus is called the Word, the Word incarnate. **Jesus is the Word incarnate. The Word is the expression of God's understanding of God**. God understands God. God understands himself and expresses this understanding as the Word. If you think about yourself, if you sit and think, and then you have a thought and you express your thought, you call that expression a "word." In the Middle Ages they had *verbum mentis*, the word of the mind or the word of the tongue. The word of the mind—so God has a Word of his own mind—that becomes incarnate in Christ. But it's joined to a human nature. The human nature can't absorb all of it at once; it grows; it has to grow, as we have to grow. So you see Jesus changing in time.

The belief of many theologians is that the **human nature is actually capable of understanding God**, which is why Jesus himself was able to do what he did, and that we can grow into that too. We are not infinite, but **we do have this capacity because we are made in the image of God** in the first place.

Well, that's why in the early Church they regarded death as the true moment when one accepted Baptism. That's why they say in Baptism you have already died with Christ, but then you don't really fully die with Christ until you actually are dying. That's why people said it was a curse if you died suddenly. Today people think oh, wouldn't it be great to die suddenly. In the early Church it was terrible because you may not be ready; you had

to get ready. The saints have said all this. And most of it is to the point of **don't ever limit God's mercy. That last moment can last a long, long time.** "At the hour of our death" we pray—be with us at the hour of our death. But the hour of our death could mean many, many, many hours or days or weeks or whatever we need.

Hopefully and we **keep growing**; that's the main thing—keep growing, keep moving. **It's not holding on to any sacred category.**