



# The Integral Nature of the Liturgical Formation of the People of God in Light of the Apostolic Letter *Desiderio Desideravi*

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**Abstract:** This article focuses on the concept of liturgical formation, which Pope Francis identified as an urgent need for the entire Catholic Church in his Apostolic Letter *Desiderio Desideravi*. Since the liturgy is a concrete reality and not a mere idea, formation presupposes the prior fulfillment of conditions which are faith and awareness of the nature of the liturgy, as well as the proper disposition of a person based on Christian anthropology. First, the broad perspective of the liturgy was presented, which is the work of the entire Holy Trinity, expressed in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, whose goal is to bring every creature into communion with the Creator. Man participates in this work as a corporeal-spiritual being with the ability to understand symbols and capable of liturgical action. Formation for participation in the liturgy involves not only intellectual preparation, but also ascetical preparation, that is, the involvement of the whole person and all the faculties of man in the process of becoming like Christ, the source of which is the celebration. Formation through participation in the liturgy applies to all conditions and forms of Christian life; therefore, based on the Apostolic Letter and the Church's teaching, a general characterization of the formation of the various groups of the faithful has been made. On this basis, liturgical formation is an integral process for the formation of the human person as a liturgical person, capable of realizing his vocation which comes from the fact of creation.

**Keywords:** liturgy, liturgical formation, *Desiderio Desideravi*, Pope Francis, liturgical theology, mystagogy

One of the pioneers of the liturgical theology movement has observed that the liturgy can be like the biblical Rachel (cf. Gen. 29:17–31): beautiful, but barren (Beauduin 1987, 145). Participation in the liturgy can be a moving aesthetic, emotional, or even spiritual experience resulting from its harmony, the beauty of songs and place—but at the same time not fulfill its fundamental purpose, which is the glorification of God and the sanctification of man (SC 7). The celebration might not influence Christian life, remaining merely a ritual-cult phenomenon limited to a few holy days each year. It cannot be said that such a liturgy is the source and summit of Christian life (SC 14). The reason for this does not lie in the liturgy, because that in fact is the work of the risen and living Lord Himself. The reason is to be found in man, affected by the results of original sin, and who from that time has had to make an effort to achieve unity within himself and unity with God (CCC 409).

From the very beginning, the Church has helped all its members in this process through liturgical formation, i.e., a kind of multi-level education arising from the

nature of the liturgy and leading above all to full, active, conscious, and communal participation in it (SC 14–20). In 2022 Pope Francis published the Apostolic Letter *Desiderio Desideravi*,<sup>1</sup> dedicated to this very topic. This letter is characterized by two issues: the fidelity of the liturgy reformed by the Second Vatican Council; and an urgent call for a fuller understanding of its spiritual depths, which will lead to a profound spiritual renewal in the lives of the faithful (Kaproń 2023). The Pope does not intend to treat these questions in an exhaustive way (DD 1) but, based on the essence of the liturgy, wants to show liturgical formation as an important, continual, and indispensable means of authentic and mature Christian life, serving also to preserve the unity of the liturgy and the Church (DD 61).

It is necessary to emphasize that until this time no document completely dedicated to this topic addressing all the faithful at once—both clergy and laity—had ever been issued. Many documents of the universal or local Church touching on the issue of formation had been addressed either to specific groups of the faithful more closely connected to the liturgical celebration through their ministries or functions,<sup>2</sup> or they merely mentioned a need for this kind of comprehensive formation.<sup>3</sup> *Desiderio Desideravi* is the first post-conciliar document of the Magisterium of the Church to be an effort to above all indicate theological conditions arising from the nature of the liturgy and to shape basic directions of liturgical formation.<sup>4</sup>

The goal of the present study is to introduce the concept of liturgical formation contained in the Pope's letter. First, the preliminary conditions necessary for effective formation will be discussed, and then the process itself, in the classic sense proposed by the Pope, i.e., for the liturgy and by the liturgy (DD 34). This paper, within the scope of the topic discussed, also takes into account the various states of Christian life, as this formation (as well as the document) concerns the entire People of God, and everyone, according to their own gifts and tasks, should follow the path of living faith, which awakens hope and works through love, so that in worshipping God the Father in spirit and truth all may be deserving of participation in His glory (LG 41).

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<sup>1</sup> The publication date is no coincidence. The solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul (June 29) emphasizes the universality and unity of the Church, whose source is Christ.

<sup>2</sup> General guidelines regarding liturgical formation are contained in the conciliar constitution on the liturgy (SC 14–20). In addition to this, there exist documents of various ranks referring to so-called specialized liturgical formation, e.g., the *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* (Congregation for Catholic Education 1979), sections of John Paul II's apostolic exhortation (PDV 48), or the Instructions of local Bishops Conferences.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. e.g., John Paul II 1988a, nos. 14–15; 2003, nos. 72–73; cf. also RS 46.

<sup>4</sup> The topic of liturgical formation was brought up in session of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, which in February 2019 deliberated on the topic of "Liturgical formation of the People of God." Their letter is, to a certain extent, also a synthesis of these deliberations. Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 2019; Krosnicki 2019.

## 1. Preliminary Concepts of Formation

### 1.1. The Liturgy—*opus Trinitatis*

The Pope's vision of the liturgy, upon the basis of which he then formulates guidelines concerning formation, is surprising with its broad perspective of the theological understanding of the nature of the liturgy characterized by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (cf. nos. 1077–1112). According to it the source of the liturgy of the Church is the eternal love of the Persons of the Holy Trinity for man (DD 2) expressed in Christ as “His infinite desire to re-establish that communion with us that was and remains His original design.” (DD 4) This Trinitarian and at the same time Christocentric aspect is essential for understanding the dynamism and nature of the liturgy, which is not simply a ceremony. The revelation of the Holy Trinity is closely connected to the mystery of the incarnation of the Logos, since God does not reveal merely theoretical information about Himself but imparts Himself to man and enters into a relationship with him (Müller 2015, 452–53). The Pope clearly emphasizes that the personal encounter with Christ in the celebration is the consequence of His action, His “ardent longing” for our participation in the banquet, at one table (DD 4; cf. John 15:16), which ultimately anticipates the banquet of the Lamb in the kingdom of heaven (cf. Rev 19:9). Even if a person remains unaware and does not fully realize it, “every time we go to Mass, the first reason is that we are drawn there by His desire for us” (DD 6) leading to union.<sup>5</sup> In this context, the liturgy clearly appears not so much as a human activity, but as the activity of Christ who, through the power of the Holy Spirit, leads believers into communion with the Father.

If the first plan and “the ultimate end of the whole divine economy is the entry of God's creatures into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity” (CCC 260), it should also be noted that the yearning for a union of the Triune God with man is not simply the consequence of original sin. The Apostle Paul teaches that “In love He destined us for adoption to Himself through Jesus Christ,” and “chose us in Him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before Him” (Eph 1:4–5). Although the fall of our first parents directed man more towards created things, it did not ultimately thwart the Father's plan. Communion as a goal stands at the beginning of creation, because creation, capable of love, finds its fulfillment only in knowing and sharing the love of the divine Persons (Müller 2015, 186). On this basis, the Pope highlights yet another dimension of the Trinitology of the liturgy, which permeates the theological reflections contained in his letter—the goal of the liturgy is identical with the goal of creation. Francis clearly has this in mind in another document, where he writes that,

<sup>5</sup> The central place and orientation of the Paschal Mystery of Christ was also characteristic of the theology of the liturgy of Benedict XVI, who wrote that “The paschal mystery shines in the liturgy, through which Christ Himself draws us to Himself and calls us to communion.” (SCar 35)

The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from God's hands returns to Him in blessed and undivided adoration: in the bread of the Eucharist, "creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator Himself." (*LS* 236)

Therefore the Pope can also write that, "all of creation . . . was a huge preparation for that Supper." (*DD* 3) Christ, by including man in His Eucharistic sacrifice of praise, opens the path, which had been closed by sin, for creation to return to the Creator. In the liturgy creation "is assumed in order to be placed at the service of encounter with the Word: incarnate, crucified, dead, risen, ascended to the Father." (*DD* 42)

The first condition for effective formation can be formulated on this foundation. The reality present in the liturgy must be objectively recognized and accepted by each individual. The faithful must be aware of what is expressed, and of what significance for his or her Christian existence is the personal encounter with Christ, in this celebration. This attitude is nothing other than—writes Francis—a "garment of faith" which comes from listening to the word of God (cf. Rom 10:17; *DD* 5), accepting the revelation of the Christian mystery, and being amazed by the Paschal Mystery of Jesus revealing God's plan (*DD* 24–26).

## 1.2. Liturgical Anthropology

In addition to faith, understood as the recognition and acceptance of the mystery of God in Christ, the Pope sees one other element as essential for effective formation. This is a maturely formed human arena that accepts the full truth of man, his dignity, destiny, and, above all, of the transcendent dimension of humanity. Man transcends himself and is then able to enter into a personal relationship with another person, and also with God, who has constituted him in his entirety. Therefore, corporeality, sensuality, and all creatures are forms of material reality and also symbols of mediation in this encounter, in keeping with the incarnational-historical workings of God (Müller 2015, 85).

In this perspective, the nature of the liturgy itself becomes even clearer, as it is, "consistent with all action of God, following the way of the Incarnation, that is, by means of the symbolic language of the body, which extends to things, space, and time." (*DD* 19; cf. *DD* 26) Thus for the Pope the liturgy has an incarnational nature, as had already been affirmed in the conciliar constitution, "In the liturgy the sanctification of the man is signified by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which corresponds with each of these signs; in the liturgy the whole public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and His members." (*SC* 7) The longing of the Triune God to unite Himself to man through visible signs and symbols, among which the first is the Person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, requires first the ability to read these signs, and then using them so that they

lead to the source of Christian life and give it shape (DD 45). Here the Pope clearly emphasizes that the symbolic reading of the language of celebration “is not a mental knowledge, not the acquisition of concepts, but rather a living experience.” (DD 45)

Therefore, an essential condition for liturgical formation will be to educate people in an attitude that enables them to understand symbols (DD 47) and, as a result, to participate properly in the liturgical act. In this context, the Pope refers to Romano Guardini, who holds the view that the first criterion and task of liturgical formation is to reawaken man to the reality of the symbol (Guardini 2022, 48; cf. Worbs 2013, 289–300). Man is a being who in and of himself is capable of symbolic action and symbolic understanding (DD 28). In our times, however, he has lost this ability and thus the symbolic language of the liturgy is almost inaccessible to him (DD 27, 44). If the symbol is a corporeal-spiritual reality, an external sign of what is internal, then the primary task is to reacquire confidence in creation (DD 46) which—according to the methodology of incarnation—becomes an instrument of salvation and a channel of grace, a proto-sacrament. The Pope therefore speaks of the sacramentality of creation, which presupposes a symbolic, and not exclusively functional, understanding of it.<sup>6</sup> It is based on the fact that creatures and material realities point to spiritual and eternal meaning (Ratzinger 2012, 185–97). As a certain Carthusian monk teaches, after original sin, man’s sense of sight was distorted. After man rejected the Light that was supposed to show him the way, things became a danger to him, because instead of pointing to the Creator and leading to Him, created things show only themselves, and, as a result, man stops at them (Guillerand 2006, 131). Hence the necessity of correcting this perspective, which will be served by liturgical asceticism.

In Francis’ opinion, the education necessary to acquire an internal attitude of properly reading symbols is a process that encompasses the entire life of a person (DD 47). A gradual initiation into the life of the Church by one’s parents, who introduce the meaning of even the simplest signs (e.g., the sign of the cross), builds a symbolic-sacramental sensitivity which will ultimately allow the child to personally enter the space of the salvific action of God in the celebration.

However, not only the family environment but also the Church plays a part in this process, which is why the ability to understand symbols is also part of the formation gained through participation in the liturgy. Here the Pope, who is not a rubricist, emphasizes the *ars celebrandi* as a specific means of molding an attitude appropriate for such participation.<sup>7</sup> On one hand “every aspect of the celebration must be carefully

<sup>6</sup> The question of the sacramental character of the symbol understood as a mediator of identity transporting man to the world to which he belongs, has recently been extensively discussed by Louis-Marie Chauvet. The author observes that what is most spiritual is accomplished through what is most corporeal. Therefore, man is formed and transformed by the symbolic order of the liturgy (Chauvet 2017, 137–42).

<sup>7</sup> Francis is not alone on this issue. Benedict XVI wrote that “the best catechism on the Eucharist is the Eucharist itself, celebrated well.” (SCar 64; cf. SCar 40)

tended to (space, time, gestures, words, objects, vestments, song, music . . .) and every rubric must be observed,” as liturgical laxity leads to stripping the community of what is due to it, “namely, the Paschal Mystery celebrated according to the ritual that the Church sets down.” (DD 23) But on the other hand, “The *ars celebrandi* cannot be reduced to only a purely rubrical mechanism . . . The rite is in itself a norm, and the norm is never an end in itself, but it is always at the service of a higher reality that it means to protect.” (DD 48) The Pope seems to refer here to the Augustinian principle *Serva ordinem, et ordo servabit te*, when he writes that words and gestures form us, and bring order into our interior world (DD 51).

An interesting fact is also that among the acts of the *ars celebrandi*, Francis puts silence in first place, as the culmination of the sequence of rites and a symbol of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit (DD 52). Many other documents similarly emphasize the mystagogical and formative character of silence, which increases active participation (RS 39; cf. Sielepin 2006). Another powerful example is an analysis of the successive editions of the *Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani*, which shows that the latest edition of this document includes twice as many moments of silence as its first edition (Desthieux 2014).

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that in the Pope’s opinion liturgical formation will have fulfilled its purpose when participants in the liturgy have deepened their rational act of faith by accepting the fullness of the revealed mystery, and are also able to understand the symbolic language of the liturgy, adapted to its nature, in order to enter into dialogue with God, who in the incarnate Son has revealed His life and invited us to participate in it.

## 2. Formation for Participation in the Liturgy

If Christian formation is the continuous process of personal maturation and becoming more like Christ, in accordance with the will of the Father, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (*ChL* 57), then liturgical formation, as an essential part of this, can be called a vital incorporation into the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again, who is present and active in the liturgical celebration, and especially in the celebration of the sacraments. The fruit and the gift of such *actuosa participatio* in the sacraments is intimacy with God, which is the basis of the entire spiritual life (*PDV* 48).

### 2.1. Intellectual Formation

Being conscious of the broad theological understanding of such formation, Pope Francis gives it one more distinctive dimension. He stresses that above all, formation

is not a matter of something grasped mentally (*DD* 39) and, “does not consist in a mental assimilation of some idea.” (*DD* 41) Neither is it a question of knowledge, or some type of abstract thought process, but at the same time it does not dispute the intellectual dimension (Jurczak 2020, 63). This is actually essential, even fundamental, for formation, but formation is not limited to it.<sup>8</sup> This is a very interesting statement, inasmuch as it is not uncommon for formation to be understood and conducted in just this way. In this key, liturgical formation consists of lecture series, speeches, tailored retreats, and the like. Sometimes these are expanded to include considerations and practical exercises (e.g., courses for lectors, acolytes, masters of ceremonies, extraordinary ministers of the Holy Communion, training for sacristans). Formation understood in this way would therefore consist in dedicating some time to acquiring knowledge, to making the mind aware (“enlightening”), directing it to what to pay attention to (e.g., during the Liturgy of the Hours one should concentrate on discovering in the texts of Morning Prayer the perspective of Christ’s resurrection as the Sun of Justice, and in Vespers, His sacrifice). Such formation would, then, be a form of hidden knowledge that must be acquired (a form of gnosis) in order to properly participate in and celebrate the liturgy, and as a result the liturgy itself would be mainly an activity of the mind (spirit), an internal, intellectual, spiritual, and intangible effort.

Therefore, too, emphasizes Francis, theologians and various types of academic institutions play an important role. The results of their research and work should be made available to a wide range of interested parties, in order to contribute to an authentic and orthodox (leading to proper worship) deepening of theological knowledge. In his document the Pope particularly emphasizes three aspects of studies on formation (*DD* 35). The first concerns the field of liturgical hermeneutics, broadly understood, which deals with interpreting and understanding eucharistical texts and the other elements of the ritual. The texts very often have their origins in various historical, ecclesial, or even cultural contexts, which influence their form. Similarly, individual expressions (syntagms) also require appropriate philological tools in order to extract content that brings out the apostolic faith of the Church and that shapes the faith of the community and of individuals (theological synthesis) (Żądło 2011). The Pope then also points to those scholarly works that take into account the dynamics concerning the rites and their anthropological significance. A holistic concept of liturgical anthropology draws attention to the ways in which not only human desires (affective sphere) but also beliefs and personality are molded by participation in the celebration.<sup>9</sup> It is thus primarily a matter of integrally deepening the dialogue dimension of the celebration, which includes descending (katabatic, sanctifying) and

<sup>8</sup> This topic was raised in session by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments: “Liturgical formation cannot be limited to mere information about worship but must help in living out the liturgy so that it transforms life.” (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 2019, 93)

<sup>9</sup> Man participating in the liturgical act as a person. Cf. Cockayne and Salter 2022, 72–106.



ascending (anabatic, latreutic) movement. The human person is not merely a viewer and recipient, for, “fruitful participation in the liturgy requires that one be personally conformed to the mystery being celebrated, offering one’s life to God in unity with the sacrifice of Christ for the salvation of the whole world.” (SCar 64) This personal conformity, essential for *actuosa participatio*, is at the same time both internal and external, that is to say, it presupposes that, “their interior dispositions correspond to their gestures and words.” (SCar 64)

## 2.2. Ascetical Formation

Liturgical formation, as noted above, is not then an exclusively intellectual formation, because the liturgy is not an exclusively spiritual kind of worship. Christ is the Word made Flesh (cf. John 1:14). None of His actions were exclusively spiritual (non-material), nor exclusively physical. Works involving the tangible (cures, e.g.) were signs of spiritual effects (such as forgiveness of sins; cf. Matt 9:5). In other words, the glorification of the Father is proclaimed not only by the human soul, purified and united with Christ, but also by the body. The clearest example of this corporeal-spiritual union is the offering of Christ Himself, which is at the same time both physical (death on the cross) and spiritual as an expression of obedience to the will of the Father (cf. the prayer in the Garden) (Migut 2021, 87–100). The significance of the hypostatic union is crucial because it posits that the humanity of Jesus is not simply an instrument but the most perfect realization of the basic human acts of freedom, obedience, and creative dedication to God. Christology is thus the culmination of anthropology (Müller 2015, 390–391). Therefore liturgical education must not embrace the spiritual realm exclusively; but also the physical, the corporeal one. It must be integral (Araszczyk 2013, 114–15).

A suggestion concerning formation directed in this way also appears in *Desiderio Desideravi* (e.g., no. 47). When the Pope states that the existential engagement of the person of Jesus Christ is made according to the method of incarnation (hypostatic union), this means that it is, “the whole of creation that is assumed in order to be placed at the service of encounter with the Word: incarnate, crucified, dead, risen, ascended to the Father.” (DD 42, cf. DD 11, 46) Consequently the whole man, body and soul, must be included in the transforming dynamism of Christ present in the liturgy, because the final goal of the incarnation is to make man like unto God (Müller 2015, 400). Ultimately, then, man, as a new creation, is incorporated into the eternal community of the Triune God (divinization). This process can be called liturgical ascetism, which is different from moral asceticism, understood as the exclusively human effort and activity for attaining spiritual perfection (DD 20). The asceticism that the Pope has in mind is the surrender to His love and allowing Him to draw the person (DD 6). His desire (cf. Luke 22:15) is the primary cause which draws man to participate in the liturgy.



The American theologian David Fagerberg writes that liturgical asceticism is not a form of ancient dualism or even of a modern spirituality condemning the body for the sake of developing the spirit. Liturgical asceticism is the reconstruction of the *imago Dei* and does not aim to liberate the spirit from the body, but to closely unite both, and to include both of them in the dynamism of the liturgy (Fagerberg 2013, 12). Since man is a corporeal-spiritual being, the medicine for the effects of sin must be applied to the spirit through the body and with the body. Ascetic action is not a rebuke of the body, but a response to love, and is only possible because baptism has already initiated the believer into the Paschal Mystery of Christ (Fagerberg 2013, 64). Baptism thus enables us to engage in the eschatological struggle, the first stage of which is to turn away from everything that can disorient this love implanted in man. Fagerberg lists many detailed forms of this struggle, which begins with overcoming disordered desires. Ascetical formation for the liturgy therefore concerns the spiritual and the material planes at the same time, in order to form a liturgical person capable of building a full relationship with God, with created things, and with his brothers and sisters (DD 3). It does not, however, end upon entering the place of the celebration.

### 3. Formation Through Participation in the Liturgy

Formation by participation in the liturgy is actually the fullness of this process and leads to bringing about the goal of Christian formation. The Pope does not use abstract formulations, but in several characteristic and seemingly identical expressions he uses unequivocally personalistic and theological language. First of all he writes—as mentioned above—that recognizing the mystery of God, which is what the liturgy is all about and towards which the entire formation effort is directed, “is not a question of something grasped mentally but a relationship that touches all of life.” (DD 39) Next, he observes that this process, “does not consist in a mental assimilation of some idea but in real existential engagement with His person,” on becoming Him, because the purpose and fullness of formation is to become like Christ (DD 41). So in essence, “The celebration concerns the reality of our being docile to the action of the Spirit who operates through it until Christ be formed in us. (Cf. Gal 4:19).” (DD 41) Formation is therefore based on existential commitment, which is accomplished sacramentally (DD 42). Based on the above statements of the Pope, it seems possible to propose three levels of development of Christian life shaped by the liturgy.<sup>10</sup> At the same time they can be applied to the various states of persons being

<sup>10</sup> Marco Benini presents another perspective based on the Pope’s letter, treating the story of the disciples on their way to Emmaus as a paradigm of liturgical formation understood mainly as a liturgical catechesis addressed to families. It is created by three principles: showing the connection between liturgy and life

formed, because although the call to holiness and the liturgy are shared by all, the degree of participation and the level of commitment may differ significantly.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the conciliar document on the liturgy had already emphasized that liturgical formation should take into consideration the age and condition, the way of life, and the standard of religious culture of participants in the liturgy (SC 19).

### 3.1. Formation of the Faithful—the Baptismal Priesthood

First of all, as Francis writes, formation consists in building a relationship with Christ which touches one's life (*DD* 39). This is the fundamental level and the first stage in drawing closer to Christ. An example of such a relationship can be the disciples and listeners of Jesus, those who heard about Him, gathered around Him, but whom He did not choose in the same way as the Apostles (*DD* 11).<sup>12</sup> All of these built a living relationship with Jesus which affected their lives authentically and concretely, but afterwards they returned to their everyday activities. But yet their lives had been changed. The woman suffering from hemorrhage, freed from that which had been limiting her life, was able to perform her household duties. Zaccheus, freed from greed and selfishness, became directed to serving others. The Kingdom of God, which had approached them in the person of Jesus Christ, became the source of a completely new life—not just a momentary experience.

This level of liturgical formation can especially be applied to those faithful who, following their vocation in family, marriage, or individually, develop a living bond with the Master through a regular participation in the liturgy which transforms their daily reality. The liturgy, as participation in the Paschal Mystery and an encounter with the Risen Lord seated at the right hand of the Father, gives meaning to their struggles. This is one of the more important and liturgically-oriented observations of the conciliar constitution *Lumen Gentium* as regards the worship of lay Catholics, participants in the priestly mission of Christ through the sacrament of baptism.

For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne—all these become “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pt 2:5). Together with the offering of the Lord's Body,

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(e.g., through the testimonies of parents), deepening the understanding of symbols, and supporting active participation in the liturgy (Benini 2024).

<sup>11</sup> Francis proposes imagining identifying oneself with figures from Sacred Scripture, which is evidence of his own formation based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. One of the tools of this method is to engage the senses in contemplating scenes from the life of Christ (Ferrone 2023, 18–19).

<sup>12</sup> We can mention here e.g., the woman with the hemorrhage (cf. Matt 9:20–23), Zaccheus whose life changed after meeting with Jesus (cf. Luke 19:1–10), the two blind men from Jericho whose loud cries were heard and who followed Him (cf. Matt 20:29–34), Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (cf. John 11:2–44), and many others.

they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus, as those everywhere who adore in holy activity, the laity consecrate the world itself to God. (LG 34; cf. ChL 14)

### 3.2. Formation of the Clergy and Consecrated Persons

The second level of liturgical formation, as the Pope writes, can be classified as a real, existential involvement in His person. It assumes a deeper, more personal relationship than the one discussed above. An example here can be the Apostles, whom Jesus chose after a night spent in prayer (cf. Luke 6:12). They left everything and followed the Master, whereas the others (mentioned above) returned to their homes and daily lives. On this level all spheres of the life and activity of the person are re-ordered and incorporated into the mission of Jesus, in which these chosen ones participate in a manner different from the rest. The relationship uniting them to Him is now not simply friendship, but something greater. To explain the relationship between Jesus and the Twelve, St. John the Apostle uses the concept of *philia*, which Benedict XVI translates as the love of friendship (DCE 3).<sup>13</sup>

This level of formation can especially include consecrated persons and the clergy. Their participation in the liturgy is characterized by its frequency (daily participation in Holy Mass is recommended) and degree of involvement, which might be expressed by functions and services performed.<sup>14</sup> But above all it is their spousal relationship to Christ confirmed by the sacrament of holy orders or by vows or consecration. In a document on priestly formation John Paul II pointed out that a life of interior union with Jesus Christ, the foundation of which is baptism, and its food the Eucharist,

has to express itself and be radically renewed each day. Intimate communion with the Blessed Trinity, that is, the new life of grace which makes us children of God, constitutes the “novelty” of the believer, a novelty which involves both his being and his acting. It constitutes the “mystery” of Christian existence which is under the influence of the Spirit: it should, as a result, constitute the ethos of Christian living. (PDV 46; cf. EG 264)

### 3.3. Formation for the Entire People of God

The last stage, we can suppose, no longer covers selected groups of the faithful, but concerns all participants in the liturgy. It is the common goal of all the baptized.

<sup>13</sup> This is different from *eros* or *agape*.

<sup>14</sup> An example might be the instruction on the subject of the *Ordo Virginum*, which states, “They place the Eucharist at the center of their existence. It is the sacrament of the spousal covenant from which flows the grace of their consecration. Called to live in intimacy with the Lord, identifying with Him and conforming to Him, sharing in the celebration of the Eucharist where possible every day, they receive the Bread of life from the table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ.” (ESI 32)

The Pope says that it is about becoming Christ (*DD* 41), and the ever-closer union with Him. This process is begun with the sacrament of baptism, “For our having believed in His Word and descended into the waters of Baptism, we have become bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.” (*DD* 14) Baptism guides the believer into the Paschal Mystery of Christ, that he may also take part in His resurrection and life. Francis adds that,

Without this incorporation there is no possibility of living the fullness of the worship of God. In fact, there is only one act of worship, perfect and pleasing to the Father; namely, the obedience of the Son, the measure of which is His death on the cross. The only possibility of being able to participate in His offering is by becoming “sons in the Son.” (*DD* 15)

Baptism therefore initiates the individual's eschatological struggle to imitate that which can be seen in the liturgy, namely a Person in filial communion with God the Father.

The focal point and goal of this level, then, is to become Christ-like and to be united with Him and to the Father through the action of the Holy Spirit. It was this topic which Jesus took up in the culminating moment of His mission, in His priestly prayer, “. . . so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and You in Me” (John 17:22–23). This is also how the Trinitarian nature of the liturgy is brought about. The American theologian mentioned above evokes a moving illustration to describe what happens within a person participating in the liturgy. The person is like a block of marble with the image of God (the Son) hidden within, and every blow of the hammer and chisel of the Holy Spirit (the sacrament of repentance and reconciliation, asceticism) frees this image from the defects of the stone, in order to create a liturgical person who shares in the filial relationship of the Son with God the Father (Fagerberg 2013, 11). In this way liturgical formation, like liturgical asceticism, forms the person who is in communion with God through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. A liturgical person is born, who stands before God and takes part in the holy offering through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ, in anticipation of the heavenly liturgy.

Benedict XVI describes this process of corporeal-spiritual formation perfectly,

to want the same thing, and to reject the same thing . . . ; the one becomes similar to the other, and this leads to a community of will and thought. The love-story between God and man consists in the very fact that this communion of will increases in a communion of thought and sentiment, and thus our will and God's will increasingly coincide: God's will is no longer for me an alien will, something imposed on me from without by the commandments, but it is now my own will, based on the reality that God is in fact more deeply present to me than I am to myself. (*DCE* 17)

## Conclusion

In one of the first documents of his pontificate Francis, speaking in the context of the evangelizing mission of the Church, emphasized the need for a progressive experience of formation in which the entire community participates, for a renewed appreciation of the liturgical signs of Christian initiation in a process that today can be called mystagogical initiation (EG 166). Applying these words to liturgical formation, one can conclude that post-baptismal liturgical formation bears the characteristics of a catechumenate, especially in relation to its final period, i.e. mystagogy. For the goal of mystagogy is a deepened awareness of the Paschal Mystery and the strengthening of its implementation in practice (OChWD 37). It is also nothing other than the practice of Christian life, having its source and summit in the liturgy.

The concept of liturgical formation presented in the Apostolic Letter *Desiderio Desideravi* proposes an integral and comprehensive introduction to the faithful of the mystery being celebrated. Given the difficulties in understanding and participating in the liturgy, Pope Francis is far from reforming it or replacing the current forms with others (old or new). He points to the need for proper and in-depth liturgical formation. This, in turn, is not limited to the catechetical (informative) dimension, but helps in experiencing the liturgy, so that the celebration of the Christian mystery unites one with Christ and in this way transforms Christian life, making it similar to the life of the Savior (cf. Gal 2:19–20; Sielepin 2023, 20–22). The liturgy, as the work of the new Adam, makes man by grace what Christ is by nature. This does not happen automatically but, respecting the freedom of the human person, it requires a commitment coming from a free decision. Liturgical formation is therefore an integral forming of the human being as a liturgical person who will be capable of fulfilling the vocation resulting from the very fact of his creation. Man “was created to serve God and love Him and to offer all creation back to Him.” (CCC 358)

*Translated by Mary E. Van Scott*

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