

Understanding the liturgy of the domestic church



Have you ever thought of your family life as a liturgy? The liturgy of domestic church life. Does that seem odd? It shouldn't.

The word "liturgy" describes the specific "work" the Church does to heal the damage sin creates in our relationships with God and others. The Liturgy of the Eucharist conquers sin's power to separate us from God and gives us the grace we need to go forth and build a civilization of love.

And that's where the liturgy of domestic church life comes in. It is this second, complementary liturgy that enables us to bring Jesus home (so to speak), empowering us to heal the damage sin has done to the very root of civilization: the human family.

Here are 5 ways the Christian family is a liturgy.

1. Instituted by God

In "The Spirit of the Liturgy," Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (before he became Pope Benedict XVI) wrote, "liturgy includes some kind of 'institution.' It cannot spring from our own creativity." The Eucharist and the ministerial priesthood were instituted by Christ on Holy Thursday. The apostles didn't make it up. Jesus gave these gifts to them and then commissioned them to "do this in memory of me."



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Likewise, as current cultural debates about the family illustrate, the Christian vision of family as one man, one woman and the children they raise together isn't obvious from a purely human perspective. The Christian vision of "family" wasn't invented by mankind. It was instituted by God (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2202).

[Read more from our Domestic Church series here.](#)

In the Garden, the Father gave Adam and Eve the first Great Commission to "go forth and multiply." By choosing to be born and raised in a family with a mother and father, Jesus conveyed a special dignity to this family arrangement. Finally, by choosing the wedding at Cana to initiate his public ministry, Christ raised marriage and family life to the dignity of a sacrament. The Christian understanding of family is not invented; it is revealed and instituted.

2. A priest presides

You can't have liturgy without a priest. Likewise, a priesthood without a liturgy is meaningless. That's why we celebrate Holy Thursday as being the institution of both the Eucharist and the ministerial priesthood. One can't exist without the other. The ministerial priesthood consecrates the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.

But did you know that, in a different sense, we are all

priests? Through baptism, every Christian person is invested in the “common priesthood of the laity.” But again, there’s no such thing as a priest without a liturgy. What is the liturgy over which the common priesthood presides? The liturgy of domestic church life. It is this liturgy that enables us “common priests” to consecrate the world to Christ as we strive to live out Christ’s sacrificial love in our homes and in the world.

3. Conveys God’s love and blessing

Liturgy conveys God’s love and blessing in a special and unique way. The Eucharist does this by facilitating the most intimate encounter with God possible this side of heaven. But the liturgy of domestic Church life also conveys God’s love and blessing in a unique way. The Catechism (No. 2205) asserts that the love experienced in the Christian family is meant to model the love that flows from the heart of God himself. The last three popes have referred to the Christian family as an “icon of the Trinity” because it is uniquely equipped to convey and model God’s self-giving love to the world.

4. Facilitates transformation and healing

Liturgy helps us to heal and to grow into godly people. The Liturgy of the Eucharist draws us into communion with the Lamb of God who takes away our sins. It makes eternal life with God possible. The liturgy of domestic Church life also facilitates healing. A healthy Christian family serves as what St. Thomas Aquinas called a “spiritual womb.” It is God’s primary way of raising loving, grace-filled disciples of Christ.

5. Draws us up into the life of God

Liturgy enables us to participate in the life of God. The Liturgy of the Eucharist gives us God’s flesh and blood and enables us to achieve union with him. Likewise, by calling the family an “icon of the Trinity,” the Church asserts that the

Christian family also acts like a liturgy. An icon isn't just a picture. It is a portal that allows the viewer to enter into a spiritual mystery. The liturgy of domestic Church life enables Christian families to personally experience the love that exists between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – the love each of us was created to long for and emulate.

The Christian family isn't just a collection of individuals living under the same roof. It is a liturgy that enables the common priesthood to consecrate the world to Christ.

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