

Gonna Take a Sacramental Journey...

The main event in Catholic worship life is the Sunday Mass (Saturday evening Mass included.) The name “Mass” comes from the dismissal in the Tridentine Latin dismissal, “Ite, Missa est.” We saw this translated in our personal missals (those of us of a certain age group) as “go, the Mass is ended,” but that’s not exactly what the Latin words mean. They mean, “Go, this is a sending,” or “Go, you are sent.” “Missa” means “sending,” and this word then became “messe” in French, “masse” in old English, and “mass” in today’s vernacular. So the common name for the Sunday Liturgy is the Mass (“the Sending.”)

It’s also common to refer to the Sunday Mass as “the Liturgy,” even though “the Liturgy” includes the Liturgy of the Hours as well as the Mass. “Liturgy” is a Greek word meaning “the work of the people.” In our usage, it denotes a ritual flow of meaningful actions that signify various aspects of our faith.

Still another name for the Sunday worship experience is “The Eucharist.” This is very appropriate, as the Mass is the source of the sacrament of the Eucharist. While it is true that the consecrated bread and wine are reserved in the Tabernacle (as the “Blessed Sacrament”), the source of the sacrament of the Eucharist is the Mass. So to call the Mass the Eucharist is a perfect fit.

The first three sacraments in our life’s journey of faith as a Catholic are Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. This is the traditional order for the celebration of these sacraments, and it is seen most clearly when adults enter the Church at the Easter Vigil. For various historical and pastoral reasons, children generally celebrate Reconciliation prior to Eucharist and Confirmation some time afterwards. In some dioceses of the United States, children celebrate Confirmation and Eucharist at the same time, around grade 3.

In any case, the celebration of sacraments is part of a journey of faith, as is the Liturgical year. As we progress through life, the sacraments we celebrate offer the support of God’s grace, giving us strength and encouragement as we strive to live by the Gospel. And as we progress through each year, we reflect on various readings from the Bible.

The layout of the church itself becomes a reminder and celebration of this journey. At the entry of the building is the sign of our entry into the life of the Church itself: The Baptismal font. Near the Font are the oils used in Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders, and Anointing of the Sick. And from the Font, we are drawn to look and then move toward the altar, where the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation originate for us. Gathered at the Table of the Lord, we pray as the Body of Christ and then are fed with His Body and Blood.

Nearby is the Table of the Word — from which we are also fed, with the Living Word of God — the same Christ who, moments later, comes to us in body, blood, soul, and divinity. What appear as two tables, for practical purposes, really are part of one Table, at which we feast on the Word and Sacrament that ARE the presence of Christ in our life and our world.

None of this is new with Vatican II, nor is any of it new with the renovation of our own church here at St. Peter. But be prepared to see all of it with new clarity and beauty as we await “in joyful hope” the completion of the renewal of the House of God here at St. Peter.