

Before taking up the topic of liturgical “vs” devotional prayer, we will return for a moment to the topic of last week’s article which focused primarily on petitionary prayer. There are several things to hold together. Ask for the most important things first – grace, conversion, wisdom, eternal life – for yourself and for others. We should also ask for material needs – needs, not just desires or superfluous things. I heard of a good Catholic man with a big family who had a regular type of work – plumber or electrician, something like that – and each time he and his wife had another child he would go before the Lord and say, in effect: Lord I have to support my family. The family was never in need. We don’t go to the Lord expecting Him to just drop whatever I want or need in my lap without any work or effort or seeking on my part, but rather with complete confidence that He will arrange things so that everything needed is provided for. Think of the cave that our Lord was born in, and the manger in which He was laid. Scripture brings this out when it speaks of our Lord providing nests for birds and so on. Even these are provided for, how much more so for sons & daughters?

Another way in which prayer can be categorized is liturgical and devotional prayer. All of what has been said so far about the essence of what prayer is (definitions of prayer), the necessary mentality or disposition for prayer, the inner room, the need for silence, and so on apply to both liturgical and devotional prayer. However, what has been said about specific prayers – like the Rosary, for example – have been about devotional prayer. Liturgical prayer is, well, first of all a little hard to articulate! Maybe it is easiest to start with examples. Liturgical prayer includes things like the Mass, all of the sacraments, the Divine Office (Liturgy of the Word), the Vigil for the deceased used at Wakes – all of these are liturgical prayer. Liturgical prayer is the formal prayer of the Church. Fr Hardon says that it is the official public worship of the Church. Devotional prayer might be called personal prayer. Devotional prayer includes things like the Rosary, the Divine Mercy chaplet, many of our vocal prayers, and so on – prayers that we can pray by ourselves, prayers that could be said with or without a priest. Many devotional prayers, like the Stations of the Cross for example, are incorporated into the life of the Church and a parish. So it’s not that devotional prayers are separate from the Church but rather that liturgical prayer is (we might say) provided by and governed more strictly by the Magisterium of the Church. The Mass is the supreme example. The Church provides very specific instructions for offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. And one of those instructions is: do not add to, subtract from, or in any way modify the instructions for Mass, including priests – priests get a sort of dishonorable mention! In other words, it is strict. The Church also provides and gives guidance on devotional prayer, but it is less strict and people are free to participate in it in a variety of ways. A good example of this is the Rosary. The Church puts forth certain Mysteries for certain days but if you want to use a different set of Mysteries you certainly can. For example, some might want to use the Sorrowful Mysteries every day during Lent, and they certainly can.

Liturgical prayer (let’s just say Mass for now) and devotional are very much related and intertwined; they are not, by any means, just two different categories of prayer, it is not one or the other, the two go together. The Mass is called the source and summit of the life of the Church, of spiritual life. The word summit means a high point, the top of the mountain, let’s say. You don’t just arrive at the summit of the mountain – the mountaintop – you have to climb up there. An dispensable part of that climbing is your personal (devotional) prayer. If a person doesn’t make the climb, they won’t reach the summit. Perhaps here we can begin to see why Eucharistic Adoration is recognized by many great saints, and indeed the Church herself, as the supreme devotion. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the supreme act of worship of God here on earth. All prayer, but in a supreme way Eucharistic Adoration, prepares us for this participation. Notice that the *last* thing our Lord did with the Apostles – not the first thing and certainly not the only thing – was create the Mass, the Holy Eucharist, and Holy Orders to perpetuate it. Our Lord did not jump to the summit right away, such a thing is impossible for man. The Apostles prepared (or were prepared) for the Mass. How? It’s obvious from the Gospels – by spending time with Him, outside of / prior to Mass, getting to know Him, becoming familiar with Him. They dwelt with Him and spoke with Him. What is that? That is exactly what Eucharistic Adoration (spending time / dwelling with Him) and prayer (conversation with Him) are. Ladies and gentlemen, we can see easily that this “prescription” of: dwelling with the Lord (Eucharistic Adoration) and conversing with Him (personal prayer),

culminating in Mass, is our Lord's own design. If we don't follow it, we will not know the Lord and we will gain very little, if anything, from that supreme prayer, supreme act of worship, that Jesus has given to His Church – the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

We might look at the Apostles and say – well they had a big advantage, they were able to live with our Lord, dwell with Him, spend all that time in His immediate presence. YES! That's true, and He now offers us the same thing day after day, night after night by waiting for us in the Tabernacle. Go to Him if you want to live.

Let us come back to the point that the Church provides very specific instructions for liturgical prayer, and especially the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, with one of those instructions being: don't add to it, don't subtract from it, don't modify it in any way. Pope Francis said: **“I am saddened by abuses in the celebration of the liturgy on all sides. In common with Benedict XVI, I deplore the fact that ‘in many places the prescriptions of the new Missal are not observed in celebration, but indeed come to be interpreted as an authorization for or even a requirement of creativity, which leads to almost unbearable distortions.’”** Why this insistence on doing what the Church tells us to do in Mass?

First of all, what kind of things do you make all kinds of plans and preparations for? Small things of lesser importance, or big events of great (or at least greater) significance? Of course it's the latter. If you go into a town that you're not familiar with and see people scurrying all around putting up various things, making all kinds of preparations for something, you would say: I don't know what's going on but whatever it is, it must be a big deal. We do this also in our relations with those close to us. If an adult son or daughter wants to just visit with their mom or dad for awhile, they'll just stop by or give them a call. You don't plan out all kinds of details. This is like personal prayer. But if you're going to have a wedding or even a surprise birthday party or something like that – a bigger event for them – you spend all kinds of time making plans and preparations. The same is true for Mass. So on the one hand, the instructions for Mass, and an insistence on following them, is communicating to us the supreme importance of this event.

Now while that is not an unimportant piece, at the same time it's not enough. We have to tie this to a second thing....Our Lord's sacrifice was first and foremost...what? Atonement for our sins? It was that, *but* – not first and foremost, most basically or principally of all. It was first and foremost His worship of the Father. Worship means: this is what you mean to me, this is what you are worth to me. The whole time during His Passion, our Lord was saying: this is what you are worth to me, Father – I will bear all this, lay down all for you. Sin is a failure to worship God. Sin says: you are not worth that much to me, this (whatever it is we turn to) is more important. Our Lord offered perfect worship, which then made atonement. But was this an act of substitution – take Him and not me, I don't do anything? If the father of a family sacrifices himself for his family, does the family not participate, do they not know his pain and sacrifice and feel it themselves? The sacrifice belongs to the father principally, but the rest of the family shares in it with him. The same is to be true for us with the Lord. We are to participate in His sacrifice, especially in everyday life. But then a person who has a genuine love of their father (and likewise of our Lord) wants a tangible way to unite their sacrifice with his. And this is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It is our highest form of worship on earth (the summit) precisely because it is participation in the Son's own worship of the Father.

Do you want to figure out how best to do that? Anyone who answers yes to that needs to set themselves aside before they can truly worship God. Anyone with any humility and any genuine love of our Lord says no, this is too important, this is too big. Please Lord, give us an authority who we know speaks on your behalf so we can do the best job of it. That authority is the Magisterium of the Church, established by our Lord Himself. It is the Magisterium that has this responsibility.

This brings us to one more aspect of prayer. Prayer is not something isolated, it's not just part of the day. We have to live integrated lives. If we practice personal & liturgical prayer and yet do not strive to set aside sin and take up our cross on a daily basis, then we remain on the surface in relation to our Lord. Go all in and you will be glad you did. God bless you, Fr Kuhn.