The Sacred Liturgy: The Work of the Most Holy Trinity

Since Pentecost, the Church – present to the world – has understood herself as both the guardian of and path to the mystery of Jesus Christ. Christ abides in his Church continuing his work of salvation “until he comes” again (Cor 11:26). This work of salvation occurs principally when the Church gathers for the celebration of the Liturgy. Jesus has promised: “Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18.20). Although Jesus is present as Head of his Body the Church, the Liturgy is also to be understood as the work of the Most Holy Trinity.

God the Father is both the source and goal of the Liturgy (CCC § 1077). From the beginning of creation, “God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing . . . and destined us to be his sons through Jesus Christ” (Eph 1: 3-6). Indeed, the whole of the Father’s work from the beginning of time to the end time is extravagant blessing and gift. All creation sings the glory and grandeur of God, and his blessing is manifold in all living things, especially in man and woman for they are created in God’s very image. Adam and Eve’s abuse of their extraordinary gifts led to a curse upon themselves and upon the whole earth. Here is the great measure of the Father’s blessing: his merciful refusal to abandon them and all humankind forever to darkness and hopelessness.

The Old Testament chronicles the great blessing of God’s plan of redemption, and his great deeds among his Chosen People. All culminates in the gift of the Messiah, the Son of God who gives his life in fulfilling the Father’s plan of redemption and salvation.

“Seated [now glorified] at the right hand of the Father” (Heb 8:2). and pouring out upon the Church, the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ now acts through the Church and her sacraments. In these liturgical celebrations, it is his dying and rising – his self-offering for the sake of the world’s salvation – which is made present in our midst. Unlike other historical events which happen once and then fade into the past, the event of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection transcends all times (CCC 1085). It is present in all ages, to all who believe and seek redemption and salvation. To enter into this redemptive mystery of Christ is to be immersed in his grace and mercy and to give thanks to the Father, the source of this great blessing.
The risen Christ, one with the Father in his plan that the work of salvation be accomplished, entrusted to his Apostles – and to their successors through the ages – his power of redemption. In order to accomplish this great work, Christ, as he promised, is always present in his Church – principally in her liturgical celebrations. Specifically, he is present not only in the person of the priest... but also in the Church when she prays and sings ... in his word when the Scriptures are proclaimed . . . and in a most extraordinary way at Mass, in his holy Body and Blood. Our prayer, joined to his, provides an experience and foretaste of eternity’s praise.

In the Liturgy, it is the **Holy Spirit** who **prepares** the Church to encounter Christ in its midst by awakening and strengthening the community’s faith. As the Old Testament was a time of careful preparation for the advent of redemption in Christ, similarly the Spirit’s work is to prepare the assembly for the present time of its own redemption. As teacher of the faith, the Spirit helps unveil the mystery of Christ hidden in significant events and words of Old Testament prophets and psalmists, revealing them as prototypes of the mystery of Christ to the Apostles and early Church Fathers as well as to us in our day.

Since the Liturgy is truly the **memorial** of the mystery of Christ, the Spirit, referred to as the Church’s **living memory**, (CCC § 1099) recalls Christ and “all that he has done for us” (Cf. In 14.26) through all the scriptures that are read. By the Spirit, the Word of God deepens the faith of those who read or hear it with a ready heart and a response of acceptance and commitment.

It is also the Holy Spirit who makes the saving work of Christ in the Liturgy present and active by his **transforming power** (CCC § 1107). The dying and rising of the Lord as an actual event happened only once and is never repeated. The celebration of that mystery and its consequences – an outpouring of the Holy Spirit’s power – will continue to the end time. In the Eucharist, for example, the priest, imposing his hands over the bread and wine, asks the Father to send the Spirit upon the gifts that they might become the Body and Blood of the Lord. The efficacy of that invocation – with Jesus’ words of consecration – truly brings about the divine event of the dying and rising with the Lord, communion with Christ and within the Church.

Clearly, all liturgical prayer (to the Father, through the Son, and in the power of the Spirit) is Trinitarian in its essence. Where Jesus is, there is the Father; where the Father and Son are, there is the Holy Spirit.
Reflection Questions:

1. In the Liturgy of the Church, how do we see the action of each of the Persons of the Most Blessed Trinity?

2. In what parts of the Mass are the Persons of Father, Son, and Spirit most especially highlighted?

3. What was Adam and Eve’s response to the gifts given to them? What should be our response to the gift of the Liturgy?

Prayer:

Ever loving Father,
who is always faithful to his promises,
    you gave us your Son to forgive us our sins
    and sent your Spirit that we may grow in holiness.

Through these graces, may we always return to you, our source.

We ask this in through Christ our Lord. Amen.