

## Article

# Theology and Liturgical Principles at the Service of Evangelization—Towards a Catholic Renewal

Przemysław Sawa 

Faculty of Theology, University of Silesia, 40-007 Katowice, Poland; przemyslaw.sawa@us.edu.pl

**Abstract:** Evangelization is not only about the preaching of the kerygma (prophetic evangelization) but also has a liturgical tone (priestly evangelization) and a charity aspect (royal evangelization). When looking for ways to conduct new evangelization, we cannot neglect the liturgical aspect, especially the celebration of the Eucharist and dynamics of the church year. In this respect, the article presents the basic opportunities created by the liturgical reality for the evangelization of both the faithful and others who happen to be present at a celebration, or watching it. The article shows what tensions exist between the liturgical regulations and requirements of evangelization, but also points to various moments in the Eucharist, liturgy of sacraments or various aspects of the liturgical year which have been left unexploited. The author identifies specific challenges for liturgical evangelization and points to how to deal with them in practice. This expresses the eucharistic and liturgical spirituality of the postconciliar renewal of the Church.

**Keywords:** liturgy; Eucharist; evangelization; active participation; renewal of the Church



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## 1. Introduction

The call for a new evangelization can be clearly heard in the Church. Pope John Paul II understood it as engagement in the unchangeable mission of the baptized in a changing world, with new ardor, methods and expressions<sup>1</sup>. This is clearly a task of all the baptized, irrespective of their vocation or function. It involves the faithful acting on their own and as a community, i.e., with other people and on behalf of the Church. In this respect, it is still a challenge to have a deeper experience of the liturgy, in particular the Eucharist, which has an evangelizing potential and is inseparable from other dimensions of evangelization. However, do the liturgy, especially the Eucharist, and the course of the liturgical year offer space for evangelization?

To answer the question properly, one should first define the terms used, then present celebration and mystagogy as spaces for first and permanent evangelization, and finally ponder upon the possibilities for using the dynamics of the liturgy to proclaim and experience the Gospel: “The liturgical celebration becomes therefore the continuing, complete, and effective presentation of God’s word. The word of God constantly proclaimed in the Liturgy is always, then, a living and effective word through the power of the Holy Spirit. It expresses the Father’s love that never fails in its effectiveness toward us.” (*General Introduction to the Lectionary*, no. 4 ([The Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship 1981](#))). It is not only the word that matters, however, but also the signs, the space and all the rites.

An analysis of the source literature leads to the conclusion that in-depth studies of liturgical evangelization are rather scarce. The numerous publications on liturgy and sacraments, whether in the field of theology or rituals, do not always answer the question (see [O’Malley 2014](#)). Having analyzed the documents of the Teaching Office of the Church and the basic rules of the liturgy, I seek to show in this article the evangelizing elements of various liturgical forms.

## 2. Foundations of the Evangelizing Nature of the Liturgy

Evangelization cannot be limited to proclamation of the word only, as it is a wider reality. On the one hand, it can hardly be perceived as a synonym for pastoral activity. It is therefore important to define what evangelization is and where it is manifested, including in the liturgy and the Eucharist.

### 2.1. Evangelization and Its Types

Rather than just being a transmission of religious knowledge, evangelization is about a touching proclamation of the person and work of Jesus Christ. What matters in evangelization is the experience. [The Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization \(2020\)](#) reminded us of this by saying that “the Christian’s formative journey ( . . . ) always had an experiential character, but never neglecting the understanding of the faith. The living and persuasive encounter with Christ proclaimed by authentic witnesses was critical” (*Directory of Catechesis*, no. 97). Evangelization cannot be equated with Christianization then. Although it is an important task, the Church has not only to show the world the universal values, but courageously proclaim the word of God<sup>2</sup>, and evangelization (kerygma) is to lead people to cling to Jesus and ultimately declare that Jesus is their Saviour and Lord. This is what makes people change their thinking, actions and entire lives. In this way, the kerygma awakens the faith, contributes to its growth, leads to conversion and builds the Church (see [Seremak 2002](#), p. 260), whose power lies not in the number of the baptized but in the evangelized<sup>3</sup>. Keeping that in mind, one should also remember that the kerygma needs to be deepened. What is needed is permanent evangelization, but also mystagogy and catechesis, which teaches the faith, though always with a kerygmatic touch. The believers then strengthen their bond with Christ and become integrated in the Church.

Evangelization thus understood has its deepest justification in the mission of Jesus Christ. It participates in the “gesture” of the Son, who became human and, using human language, revealed the Father and then saved people through the paschal mystery. As the Crucified and Resurrected, he showed himself as the Prophet, the Priest and the King (Shepherd). In other words, he proclaimed the Gospel and is the Good News himself. This is not only a doctrinal or moral teaching, however, as the Word is connected with experience, is living and effective, and transforms those who accept it. Furthermore, Jesus is not only the Priest who offers a sacrifice of praise but is the offering himself. Finally, He did as he promised: “*And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all men to myself* (J 12,32)”. Thanks to all this, Jesus is a good shepherd and His reign is the kingdom of justice, love and peace. Looking at His mission, we should therefore recognize the prophetic, priestly and royal (pastoral) functions. In this threefold way, Jesus Christ still leads the work of evangelization, which finds its culmination in the redemption of man and renewal of everything in Him, thanks to the Holy Spirit.

We should consistently recognize the three types of evangelization: prophetic, liturgical and royal. Undoubtedly, the type which has received most attention, with respect to both theory and practice, is prophetic evangelization, i.e., preaching the Word of God. At the same time, evangelization through liturgy is underestimated. This type is not about delivering homilies but rather about the evangelizing dimension of liturgical signs and celebrations as a whole. Eventually, mercy should be viewed as a royal service—it is still a challenge, though, to link help to those in need with the kerygmatic message and religious experience.

What lies at the heart of these three areas is the Word—in prophetic evangelization it is the proclaimed Word, in priestly evangelization—the celebrated Word, and in royal evangelization—the Word experienced in service to others.

### 2.2. Relation between the Eucharist and Evangelization

Evangelization leads to liturgy (Eucharist) but the Eucharist also evangelizes the faithful. John Paul II reminded the Church that liturgy “is a means of sanctification; it is a celebration of the Church’s faith, and a means of transmitting the faith. Together with Sacred

Scripture and the teachings of the Fathers of the Church, it is a living source of authentic and sound spirituality" (*Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 70 (John Paul II 2003)). The Eucharist also motivates the faithful to undertake their missions, as called for in the dismissal command: *Ite, missa est*. The faithful should therefore share what they experienced during the meeting with the Lord. It is for this reason that the Eucharist and the missionary work cannot be separated. Benedict XVI said that "the wonder we experience at the gift God has made to us in Christ gives new impulse to our lives and commits us to becoming witnesses of his love" (*Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 85 (Benedict XVI 2007)) and that "the more ardent the love for the Eucharist in the hearts of the Christian people, the more clearly will they recognize the goal of all mission: to bring Christ to others" (Ibid., no. 86)<sup>4</sup>. You can only share what you actually have. In this way, "through the mystery of his complete hiddenness, Christ becomes a mystery of light, thanks to which believers are led into the depths of the divine life" (Ibid., no. 11).

An important warning was given by Joseph Ratzinger. To him, it would be incorrect to use the Eucharist for propaganda purposes; evangelization (mission) cannot be a propaganda. The Eucharistic liturgy should be seen as a mystical center of Christianity and a source of the missionary dimension, as it cannot come from strategy and planning only (See Ratzinger 2012, pp. 397–98).

However, it still seems necessary to discover the sense and meaning of the liturgy as well as to properly assimilate what is the soul of the liturgical renewal, which cannot be separated from other aspects of the Church's renewal in the spirit of the II Vatican Council. This was aptly expressed by Servant of God Fr. Franciszek Blachnicki, founder of the international youth and adult ministry Light—Life Movement, who said that "the novelty of the conciliar concept of the liturgy ultimately leads to overcoming of the shortages that have piled on over the ages and to restoration of a clear, full, integral and original concept, resulting from the essence of God's redemptive plans and the Church, learned through the revelation in the tedious theological and historical studies" (Blachnicki 2015a, p. 6).

### 3. Liturgical Celebration in the Evangelization Work

Since evangelization is closely connected with the liturgy, the liturgical and sacramental celebration and mystagogy should be viewed in the context of the first and permanent evangelization of the baptized. Liturgy is "the privileged place for catechizing the People of God" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2003, no. 1074; see *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 5. 95 (The Holy See 2002)). This idea is developed in the *Directory for Catechesis*: "Liturgy is one of the primary and indispensable sources of the Church's catechesis, not only because one can derive from liturgy the contents, language, gestures and words of faith, but mainly because they belong to each other in the very act of faith" (*Directory of Catechesis*, no. 95). There is an analogous connection between the liturgy and kerygmatic preaching. Benedict XVI reminded us that "to understand the word of God, then, we need to appreciate and experience the essential meaning and value of the liturgical action. A faith-filled understanding of sacred Scripture must always refer back to the liturgy, in which the word of God is celebrated as a timely and living word" (*Verbum Domini*, no. 52). How can this be put into practice?

#### 3.1. *Ars Celebrandi*

The art to celebrating the liturgy (*ars celebrandi*) is important for evangelization and cannot come down to aesthetics only. True spiritual experience and passing it down to other people through the testimony of prayer are key. Ultimately, it is all about God's love given through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. In view of this, it is worth recalling the thought of Benedict XVI that in the beauty of the Eucharist "the splendour of God's glory surpasses all worldly beauty. The truest beauty is the love of God, who definitively revealed himself to us in the paschal mystery" (*Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 35 (Benedict XVI 2007)). It is also not surprising that John Paul II said that the Eucharist is a mystery "which above all must be well celebrated. Holy Mass needs to be set at the centre of the Christian life and

celebrated in a dignified manner by every community . . . ” (*Mane nobiscum Domine*, no. 17 (John Paul II 2004)).

The beauty of the liturgical celebration when understood in this way is within the broad category of beauty, which interweaves with truth and good. As Pope Francis noted, that is why “every form of catechesis would do well to attend to the “way of beauty” (*via pulchritudinis*)” (*Evangelii gaudium*, no. 167 (Francis 2013)). A beautiful celebration, if properly animated and explained without unnecessary pomposity, becomes a way to evangelize the faithful and those who participate in the liturgy only occasionally. It shows the language of the heart, which values the testimony of the participants, the authenticity of the behavior of believers and, most importantly, the actions of the Holy Spirit. It is good to remember what the expected outcomes of such an experience are: “the contemplation of beauty awakens joy, pleasure, tenderness, a sense of fullness and meaning in the human being, and opens them to transcendence” (*Directory of Catechesis*, no. 109). Thus, the liturgy is not only a cult, but proclaims “the beauty of God that can be experienced, touches your heart and mind and changes your life” (*Ibid.*, no. 175). The experience of Eastern liturgies, which should be read by heart with internal openness to an encounter with the One to Come, may be helpful in this respect.

This is why *ars celebrandi* is so important. It includes words, gestures, postures, silence, liturgical colors, paraments, religious architecture, iconography, space, time and circumstances. Songs during the liturgy are of particular significance, as they should express the sacrum and correspond with the nature and time of celebration, while respecting the tradition and liturgical regulations (*Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 40–42)<sup>5</sup>. The point where the law, tradition and people’s sensitivity meet is where major difficulties may arise. More and more believers do not find traditional ecclesiastical music appealing to them. The tension which from time to time arises with respect to evangelization or charismatic groups is not only a dispute about aesthetics or tradition. In fact, the Church should ask a fundamental question about its own Catholicism, which assumes that there are many ways to express and experience faith under the single *Credo* and the single ministry of Pope and bishops. A question may also be posed about a broader acceptance of various styles addressed to various groups of believers or even people on the peripheries of the Church<sup>6</sup>. For quite a large number of people, praise and worship music is more meaningful and helps them be more open to religious experiences.

Regarding *ars celebrandi*, one should also consider an active participation (*actuosa participatio*) of the faithful. It is a clear sign of the participants’ faith<sup>7</sup>. However, the first and foremost thing is not an engagement seen on the outside (e.g., songs, prayers) or participation in the actions taking place (e.g., readings, singing, universal prayer), although these aspects matter too, but rather an inner entering into God’s presence. As Joseph Ratzinger noted, the participation in its deepest sense is about the participants of the liturgy internally joining in the *oratio*, the Eucharistic Prayer, which is offered by the celebrating bishop or presbyter and which leads the faithful into the *actio* of God. Therefore, “liturgical education should lead toward ( . . . ) the essential *actio* that makes the liturgy what it is, toward the transforming power of God, who wants, through what happens in the liturgy, to transform us and the world” (Ratzinger 2012, p. 139). Yet, such deep participation can only take place if a person has properly shaped faith and takes active part in the entire life of the Church community<sup>8</sup>. Life and liturgy are, therefore, organically connected.

### 3.2. Necessity of Eucharistic (Liturgical) Mystagogy<sup>9</sup>

Mystagogical catechesis also has an evangelizing dimension and cannot be limited to a purely intellectual (historical, theological) one. Spiritual experience of the depth of the liturgy is necessary. This includes “explanation of the rites in the light of the redemptive events, ( . . . ) introduction into the meaning of liturgical signs; a mystagogical catechesis should be capable of making the faithful more sensitive to the language of signs and gestures, ( . . . ) presentation of the meaning of the rites and their relevance to the Christian life . . . ” *Directory of Catechesis*, no. 98)<sup>10</sup>. The Eucharist itself also has the mystagogical

dimension, as “the liturgy can be pedagogically effective in helping the faithful to enter more deeply into the mystery being celebrated” (*Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 64). It is therefore understandable why demands appear for proper catechesis which would educate about the liturgy from the perspective of the kerygma and experience and in relation to the everyday life of believers. The liturgy will thus become a real source and a true school of spirituality, prayer and life. It will be necessary to clearly link the message of the liturgical texts and rites with people’s lives, personal prayers and challenges of the day. Thus, rather than taking place beside people’s lives, the liturgy will be at the center.

### 3.3. Eucharist and Christian Rites as Testimony to the World

Looking at the Eucharist, one may want to ask about its missionary direction. Joseph Ratzinger says that “the Eucharist, as such, is not directly oriented toward the awakening of people’s faith in a missionary sense. It stands, rather, at the heart of faith and nourishes it . . . ” (Ratzinger 2012, p. 377). Clearly, the purpose of the liturgy is not to evangelize people who are outside the Church, but to worship God, attract people to Him, and sanctify the participants. Nevertheless, the celebration of the liturgy, in particular the Eucharist, is undoubtedly a testimony of faith to the whole world. Firstly, it shows the precedence of God—the participants are there for Him, He is the center, and the entire liturgical activity is directed at the Lord. A remarkable example of this is the legend about the beginning of Christianity in Rus. It says that prince Vladimir was not convinced by the arguments presented by representatives of Islam or Judaism or papal envoys from Germany. What was key was the account given by the prince’s messengers, who, having returned from Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, said: “We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth, for surely there is no such splendor or beauty anywhere upon earth. We cannot describe it to you. Only we know that God dwells there among men, and that their service surpasses the worship of all other places. We cannot forget that beauty” (988 Vladimir Adopts Christianity 2023).

This aspect of the liturgy is important to people now, too—correct celebration of the liturgy puts God in first place in people’s lives again. For churchgoers, it is a possibility to grow into Christ, while for seekers or the unbelieving, present for some reason at the celebration, this testimony may help them ask questions and eventually open up to the Gospel. Clearly, the celebration itself is not enough. It must be integrated in the whole life of the Church, the pro-evangelization and evangelization activities, the credibility of the Church and the authenticity of the believers.

In addition, the sacred space used for the liturgy should express the Church’s faith and serve the purposes of evangelization and catechesis<sup>11</sup>. A properly positioned altar and pulpit emphasize the significance of the Eucharist and the Word of God, the place of celebration shows the pastoral mission of the celebrant, who acts *in persona Christi Capitis*, and the right place of the tabernacle directs people’s minds and senses to the presence of the Lord (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 314–15 (The Holy See 2002))<sup>12</sup>. It is worth noting that Benedict XVI recommended that “churches give a place of honour to the sacred Scriptures, even outside of liturgical celebrations” *Verbum Domini*, no. 68). Sacred art (pictures, icons, decorations) should also be cared for so that the interior design offers space for spiritual experience, even if only in an initial form.

### 3.4. Evangelization Opportunities during the Eucharist

If the Eucharist must not be separated from evangelization, the challenge remains to discover and exploit the evangelization potential of the celebration. This includes several material areas: the experience of community, introductions and commentaries, moments of silence, the manner in which the Holy Communion is received, and the time of thanksgiving.



### 3.4.1. Attention to the Experience of Community

It is important that during the Eucharist the participants experience that they are a part of a community and recognize faith as a community reality. The fraternal encounter is essential for understanding what Christianity is. The liturgy is not only a space for personal religious fulfilment or an individual acceptance of God's Word and grace—"The liturgy in its entirety is a sign of what the Church is, that is the sign of community. When we go to attend a Holy Mass or another liturgical gathering, we go there to join into a community, to express the fact that every one of us is a member of the community, to experience unity with the entire community of the Church, and to show it on the outside. ( . . . ) I need to feel that I am a member of the community of the Church and I must consciously join the congregation and the essence of Christianity and the Church . . . " (Blachnicki 2015b, p. 84)<sup>13</sup>. John Paul II noted that "all this will be helped by gestures of welcome and by the tone of prayer, alert to the needs of all in the community" (John Paul II 1998, no. 44). The experience of acceptance and encounter during a Eucharistic celebration helps the participants to better identify with the Church and encourages them to be involved in other, non-liturgical, forms of meeting in order to truly "promote a spirituality of communion" (*Novo millennio ineunte*, no. 43).

### 3.4.2. Introductions and Commentaries

It is a good idea to use certain moments in the liturgy for various commentaries, such as introduction after the greeting, commentary on the readings, commentary during the offertory procession, commentary on the Eucharistic prayer (before the preface), before the communion rite (before the call to the Lord's Prayer) or the concluding blessing<sup>14</sup>. Of all the possibilities listed above, introduction to the liturgy of the word seems particularly helpful. Benedict XVI noted that at that moment of the liturgy "when circumstances so suggest, a few brief words of introduction could be offered in order to focus the attention of the faithful. If it is to be properly understood, the word of God must be listened to and accepted in a spirit of communion with the Church and with a clear awareness of its unity with the sacrament of the Eucharist" (*Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 45). Good commentaries, both with respect to content and form of presentation, are natural evangelizing and catechizing tools.

### 3.4.3. Moments of Silence

Maintaining the moments of silence is important in the liturgy (see *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 45 (The Holy See 2002)). As Benedict XVI reminded, "the word, in fact, can only be spoken and heard in silence, outward and inward. Ours is not an age which fosters recollection; at times one has the impression that people are afraid of detaching themselves, even for a moment, from the mass media. For this reason, it is necessary nowadays that the People of God be educated in the value of silence. ( . . . ) Hence I encourage Pastors to foster moments of recollection whereby, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the word of God can find a welcome in our hearts" (*Verbum Domini*, no. 66). However, a proper introduction must be made to the recollection to make sure that it is not treated as a break in the celebration but as a time of personal encounter with the Lord and, despite taking place in a community, a private dialog with Him. Education for reflection through silence is important, then, but is becoming more and more difficult in the world full of sounds, movement, changes, impressions and various stimuli. The faithful should be helped to start personal prayer while experiencing time in the community.

### 3.4.4. Manner of Receiving Holy Communion

Partaking of the Table of the Lord is also evangelizing in nature. The external form should express the gravity and significance of the mystery. Benedict XVI said: "I ask everyone ( . . . ) to make every effort to ensure that this simple act preserves its importance as a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus in the sacrament" (*Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 50). Another specific practice is approaching Communion in a procession, after proper preparation and explanation and with leadership. The beauty of the procession shows

all those who walk in it how important the moment of taking Holy Communion is, and prepares them to receive the Body of the Lord in a dignified manner; to persons who are not taking the Holy Communion, the procession manifests the Church's faith in Jesus Christ's true presence in the Eucharist. In addition, the procession shows the dual nature of the Communion: *cum Christo et inter nos*. This translates into how we experience the love for Jesus and for neighbors, as these two are inseparable<sup>15</sup>.

#### 3.4.5. Thanksgiving after Holy Communion

Thanksgiving is an important moment of the Holy Mass celebration—"besides the singing of an appropriate hymn, it can also be most helpful to remain recollected in silence" (*Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 50). Proper introduction to this part of the liturgy may be useful. People receiving the Holy Communion may treat it as an opportunity to deepen the experience of their encounter with Jesus. Through thanksgiving and praise, the faithful build their personal relation with God, become more open to what Jesus wants to do in their lives and are ready to accept God's gifts, as Jesus said to sister Faustina<sup>16</sup>. Acknowledging the role of thanksgiving in the development of the spiritual life, one may also remain after the liturgical celebration ends to give thanks and to praise God, immersing in more spontaneous prayer. In the liturgy itself, such moments are provided in holy masses for specific groups (although moderation is recommended on such occasions too)<sup>17</sup>.

### 4. Challenges of Liturgical Evangelization

Keeping in mind the above, we may try to identify the key challenges appearing on the Eucharist (liturgy)–evangelization line.

#### 4.1. Renewal of the Liturgical Preaching

The liturgy brings the Word of God and offers space to proclaim it, also through human signs and gestures. There is, then, a sacramental horizon of the Revelation or even sacramentality of the word. "The proclamation of God's word at the celebration entails an acknowledgment that Christ himself is present, that he speaks to us, and that he wishes to be heard" (*Verbum Domini*, no. 56)<sup>18</sup>. It should therefore be remembered that a homily "is not only an instruction, it is also an act of worship. ( . . . ) The homily is a hymn of gratitude for the magnalia Dei, which not only tells those assembled that God's Word is fulfilled in their hearing, but praises God for this fulfilment" (*Homiletic directory*, no. 4 (*The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments* 2015)). This prominent role of the homily requires that it is carefully prepared and its quality is improved<sup>19</sup>. A homily is important for evangelization and catechesis<sup>20</sup>. Rather than only teaching the doctrine, morality or Christian values, it should be an opportunity for a real meeting between the faithful and God. This is a time for proclaiming the powerful word and a dialog between God and His people—"the liturgical proclamation of the word of God ( . . . ) is not so much a time for meditation and catechesis as a dialog between God and his People, a dialog in which the wonders of salvation are proclaimed and the demands of the Covenant are continually restated" (*Dies Domini*, no. 41). Proper context, namely annunciation of hope, is also necessary—"What the Church proclaims to the world is the Logos of Hope (cf. 1 Pet 3:15); in order to be able to live fully each moment, men and women need the great hope "which is the God who possesses a human face and who has loved us to the end" (*Verbum Domini*, no. 91).

The preacher's testimony, or that of another person, may be helpful in an evangelizing homily. It may serve as an illustration of what is said. Such testimony, especially of lay people, may help the listeners identify more with the message preached. Certain didactic aids may also be used, although this practice still raises various concerns. In this respect, the decisions of the Second Synod of the Archdiocese of Katowice may offer some valuable clues. "Prudence should be exercised in using dialogs or theatrical and music forms in homilies. They may be allowed in sermons and conferences—provided that the sacrum of the temple, especially the presbytery, is respected. Props or outfits unsuitable for a place

of cult should not be used. Caution is recommended in the use of pictures, music, props and other such things, so as not to obscure the Gospel preached by word" ([Archidiecezja Katowicka 2019](#)). Caution is not prohibition. It seems that more courage is needed in adjusting the forms used to the specifics of the congregation, the circumstances and the spiritual needs of the participants.

#### 4.2. *Difficult Tensions*

The relationship between evangelization and the Eucharist generates certain tensions caused by the need to keep the spirit of the liturgy and obey the laws regulating it on the one hand, and the recognition of social changes and people's needs and sensitivities on the other. A broad understanding of the necessity of adaptation and inculturation seems necessary, therefore<sup>21</sup>. While the above raises no questions when mission countries are concerned, it presents a serious challenge to the Church in Europe. Meanwhile, certain difficulties cannot go unnoticed: a misunderstanding of the liturgy, especially of the traditional songs, in a growing number of the faithful, which hinders deeper participation and makes more and more baptized people give up taking part in the liturgy, an effect of many phenomena, in particular a lack of proper evangelization. However, preaching the kerygma is not enough—it would be valuable to consider the possibilities of animating the liturgy or reconsider the regulations concerning liturgy. Some balance must be maintained between excessive rubricism or rigid fixation on conventions and excessive individualism—"there is a widespread distorted attitude towards liturgy: latitude, subjectivism or strict adherence to old forms (only because they are old), with no openness to the Holy Spirit's activity in the contemporary Church. The right way is to combine obedience with spontaneity and with freedom to commit" ([Blachnicki 2015a](#), p. 50). It also seems important that the dispute between the "universal" and the "local", i.e., connected with a given group of the faithful, is solved. People of different ages, with different expectations as to their spiritual needs, and with different musical perception sometimes find it hard to actively participate in the Eucharist together. It might be a good idea to specify the form of animation of a given celebration, e.g., whether the songs will be traditional or contemporary, whether organs or other musical instruments will be used<sup>22</sup>, what the subject of the homily will be, whether some moments will be emphasized (e.g., longer thanksgiving after the Holy Communion), or whether lay people would be involved. This does not break the unity of faith but offers room for a deeper spiritual experience by the faithful.

One more issue is worthy of a mention. Although the liturgy is the source and summit of the Church's life and mission, it does not exhaust the entire pastoral work. The Church gathered for the Eucharist needs other types of meetings and formation too. Limiting parish life to liturgical celebrations and other forms of ecclesiastical piety is not a right thing to do. There must also be time for preaching God's Word, sharing faith and thoughts and experience community on a horizontal level, outside a liturgical setting. Appropriate space should therefore be provided, and the time of liturgical celebrations should be re-set. The style of work and life nowadays prevents some believers from participating in any formation on weekdays or Saturdays. Opportunities must be created for people to meet on Sundays, after the Eucharist. The above does not apply to faith-strengthening activities only but also various rituals, celebrations and catechumen's preparation for sacraments.

#### 4.3. *Formation and Commitment*

The evangelizing dimension of the Eucharist can also be seen in the expectation that all participants of the liturgy are involved in it. This is actually one of the things that the Second Vatican Council called for: "that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy" (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 14 ([II Vatican Council 1963](#))). Several essential steps must be taken to achieve this goal.



#### 4.3.1. Proper Formation of the Clergy

Lay faithful cannot be expected to take full participation in the liturgy “unless the pastors themselves, in the first place, become thoroughly imbued with the spirit and power of the liturgy, and undertake to give instruction about it” (Ibid.). It is therefore necessary for bishops and presbyters to steadily deepen their spirit of the liturgy, not only in the theological (doctrinal), functional (celebration as required by liturgical regulations) or piety aspects, but primarily with respect to a true experience of the liturgy, which helps them rationally participate and celebrate the liturgy, especially the Eucharist<sup>23</sup>. A deep awareness is needed of the sense, theology and legitimacy of particular elements of the liturgy, to foster the spirit of the liturgy, which should be a heart of the life and mission of the Church, that is the clergy and the lay together. It is understandable why Fr Franciszek Blachnicki said that “because the liturgy is personal and rational in nature, all its elements should constitute a rational and logical whole, centered around a single keynote” (Blachnicki 2015a, p. 56).

#### 4.3.2. Forming the Spirit of the Liturgy in Participants

Liturgical mystagogy, combining evangelization with catechesis, is also crucial. On the one hand, it builds an awareness of the rites and nature of the liturgy, while deepening participation in celebration and focusing spiritual life on the liturgy. Vatican II’s call concerning the faithful’s participation in the liturgy is still relevant today: “the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds should be attuned to their voices, and that they should cooperate with divine grace lest they receive it in vain. Pastors of souls must therefore realize that, when the liturgy is celebrated, something more is required than the mere observation of the laws governing valid and licit celebration; it is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects” (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 11 (II Vatican Council 1963))<sup>24</sup>. This is still a challenge to the Church. Insufficient evangelization and introduction into the mystery of the Eucharist translates into the liturgy being treated as a form of piousness and people easily giving up on participation in the Holy Communion. The problem was aptly described by Fr Blachnicki: “Exclusion from participation in the Eucharist at the decisive and climactic moment, i.e., sacramental communion, in the first place shows that most of these people have not yet acquired the ability to read the entire eucharistic assembly as a sign of *communio*—unity with God and brothers” (Blachnicki 2015a, p. 54).

#### 4.3.3. Adult Altar Servers

Active and conscious participation of the faithful, but also an undertaking of certain functions by the lay, helps them better experience the Eucharist and the sign of a eucharistic community. Not only children and teenagers but also adult servers should be involved in the tasks. They may serve as altar servers, lectors, psalm singers, cantors, readers of the intentions of the prayer of the faithful, commentary readers, persons bringing up the gifts to the altar, or collectors. Having a large number of servers is in line with the logic of the post-Vatican II renewal of the liturgy, calling for assigning various functions to various people. Fr Blachnicki aptly summarized it saying that “wherever a function can be shared ( . . . ), it is always better [to do that]. ( . . . ) If only could we grasp this deep principle of the liturgy, we would surely partake in it both more fully and fruitfully. The liturgy would become a school of Christian life to us . . . ” (Blachnicki 2015a, p. 63).

### 5. Sacraments, Liturgy of the Hours and the Church Year in the Context of Evangelization

Liturgical evangelization covers not only the Eucharist but also the celebration of other sacraments and the liturgy of the hours. It should also follow the rhythm of the church year. A deeper discovery of the significance of Sunday is particularly important.

### 5.1. Evangelization in the Celebration of Sacraments

The Second Vatican Council reminded us that sacraments not only presuppose faith, but also nourish, express and strengthen it<sup>25</sup>, and thus they have a major evangelizing potential. When a man receives a sacramental grace, he not only becomes sanctified and obtains the fruit, but is also disposed to take missions and tasks resulting from his Christian vocation. As with the Eucharist, celebration of the other sacraments serves the purpose of evangelization—in the first place of the participants, and then of those who watch, as well as others. Celebration only is not enough to fulfil this task; proper mystagogy of the mystery is also needed. Therefore, children, youth and adults should be catechized on the theological and spiritual content of sacraments. This can be carried out through various conferences and retreats, but in the first place through regular education.

Still, the very celebration of the liturgy of sacraments should evangelize. The first and general need is to become aware that “the liturgy of the sacraments and sacramentals sanctifies almost every event in their lives” (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* no. 61 (II Vatican Council 1963)). Therefore, the celebrant cannot focus on performing the rites only but should make sure that he or a person designated by him explains the subsequent elements. The homily, which is an integral part of the liturgy, should refer to it but also draw a line between the celebration and the everyday (not only spiritual) lives of those assembled.

As regards particular sacraments, the following evangelization possibilities should be identified. At baptism, the community-building nature of the celebration, the transforming grace (as seen in particular rites), and the call to mission should be emphasized. The celebration of confirmation should show the sense of receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit for becoming responsible for the Church and for evangelization. During the sacrament of penance and reconciliation it is important that people experience the healing power of God’s grace, but also that the reconciliation is relevant to the community (restoration of the relation with God and the Church); celebration of the liturgy of the Word with joint penance and individual confession, as well as ensuring that there are places (churches) with priest(s) ready to hear confessions at specific times of day, may also be helpful. With the anointing of the sick, it is important to extract the power of the paschal mystery, which strengthens the sick or leads to their healing. Sacraments at the service of the communion are also evangelizing in nature. The holy orders, of all three stages, require appropriate commentaries which would explain the parts of the rite, mainly to show the sacred nature of the holy orders rather than only inform about the ordained person having the right to serve in the community. The celebration of the sacrament of matrimony needs to connect the fiancés’ love with God’s love and their participation in the mission of the Church. In all the examples cited above, it is necessary to create an atmosphere fostering celebration, so that the active participants could have a deeper religious experience (permanent evangelization), and arouse interest in Christian life in those who are only watching.

### 5.2. Evangelizing Nature of the Liturgy of the Hours

The Liturgy of the Hours is an important aspect of the Church’s life. As Vatican II states, “the divine office, because it is the public prayer of the Church, is a source of piety, and nourishment for personal prayer” (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 90 (II Vatican Council 1963)). The beauty of the celebration, coupled with a proper introduction to the liturgy and its individual parts, may be an important testimony of the prayer of the baptized, the priority of God and true service of God. It seems that a major role in this respect is played by communities of consecrated life which recite the liturgy of the hours in public, as well as by Church renewal communities where lay people use the breviary or parts of it. Another valuable practice in parishes is prayer with a part of the liturgy of the hours, especially the matins or vespers on Sunday or other important Church holidays. Each time, attention should be paid to clarifying the nature of the daily liturgical prayer, showing the beauty of the celebration with moments for recollection and emphasizing the universal nature of the prayer.

### 5.3. Sunday as Day of the Lord and the Church

Sunday holds a special place in evangelization and Christian life<sup>26</sup>. As Benedict XVI noted, “the Christians’ customary practice of gathering on the first day after the Sabbath to celebrate the resurrection of Christ ( . . . ) is also what defines the form of a life renewed by an encounter with Christ. Saint Ignatius’ phrase—*living in accordance with the Lord’s Day*—also emphasizes that this holy day becomes paradigmatic for every other day of the week. Indeed, it is defined by something more than the simple suspension of one’s ordinary activities, a sort of parenthesis in one’s usual daily rhythm. Christians have always experienced this day as the first day of the week, since it commemorates the radical newness brought by Christ. Sunday is thus the day when Christians rediscover the eucharistic form which their lives are meant to have” (*Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 72). The celebration itself should be festive, in a way renewing the baptismal and ecclesial identity. The confession of faith, whether recited or sung, clearly expresses it. It is not only a recollection but a celebration of “the living presence of the Risen Lord in the midst of his own people” (*Dies Domini*, no. 31), and the Sunday liturgy, “the heart of the Church’s life” (*Ibid.*, no. 32), shows the communion dimension of the Church *ad intra* (for those present at the holy mass) and *ad extra* (for people outside the Church).

Keeping Sunday holy cannot be limited to participation in the Eucharist only. Beside the liturgical and interpersonal (time with family and friends) dimension, Sunday should be used to revive one’s faith outside the Eucharist, which may pose quite a challenge. Traditionally, vespers or other service served this purpose. Despite an evident crisis of these practices, it should be noted that, as John Paul II said: “in many parts of the Church, a new need for prayer in its many forms is being felt; and this is a gift of the Holy Spirit” (*Ibid.*, no. 52). It would be worthy to reconsider the way Sunday is spent to make it a day when interesting catechesis events, concerts and evenings of praise and worship, intercessory prayer, evangelization events for families and thematic meetings could take place. It might also be a good idea to devote the time for charity work and other forms of sharing the Gospel. This is all the more important in the context of the “weekend culture”, where Sunday does not have a sacral dimension. This is seen as a challenge to the Church. Ratzinger is right to say that “we will have to have more ideas on this subject than we have had up till now—on the one hand, concerning the mobility of pastoral work and the mutual openness of the parishes to one another; on the other hand, concerning ways to make the parish community an inner home prior to what goes on in worship . . . ” ([Ratzinger 2012](#), p. 241).

### 5.4. Spirituality of Liturgical Time

It is important for an integral spiritual growth and strong catholic identity that a person has a deep understanding of the church year, which is more than only a sequence of feast days and ordinary days. The liturgical year carries an entire Christian experience—“Human psychology in fact desires the celebration of anniversaries ( . . . ). A similar commemorative logic guided the arrangement of the entire Liturgical Year” (*Dies Domini*, no. 76–77). It is not about simple recollection on the one hand nor a cyclicity of the periods and events on the other. The liturgical year should be modelled on a spiral, not a circle. By going through the same substance every year, the faithful are lifted up to a fuller understanding of the faith and widen their spiritual experience, so that the relation with God is deepened and the awareness of the truths of faith is increased.

Every year, the challenge returns to make a pastoral plan for the parish in a logically arranged liturgical year, a pastoral program for the Church in Poland or a given diocese, and key motives for the universal Church. This should translate into a relevant distribution of focal points in the service of the Word (in and out of liturgy) as well as planned and animated events. Visual evangelization accompanying the liturgy remains an unexploited area. Inspiring decorations, especially during the Advent, Christmas, Lent, passion, Paschal Triduum, and Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, that are interconnected

and synchronized with the liturgy and preaching of the Word make the faithful feel that the church year is a unity offering room for permanent formation.

It is therefore necessary to ensure proper liturgical formation which would help recognize the spirit of the liturgy and see a difference between liturgy as a foundation of the spiritual life and popular piety supporting spiritual life (even though some customs may in fact obscure the right comprehension of the truths of faith). The Holy See's guidelines concerning popular piety should be followed in this respect<sup>27</sup>.

## 6. Conclusions

1. Evangelization and liturgy are closely connected and depend on each other. Being the source and summit of the Church's life, the liturgy is not everything: "before men can come to the liturgy they must be called to faith and to conversion" (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 9 (II Vatican Council 1963)).
2. We must care for the beauty of the liturgical celebration, but we cannot focus exclusively on the outside rites. Proper mystagogy and discovery of the evangelizing and catechizing dimension of the liturgy, in particular the Eucharist, are still necessary. Rites, texts and signs, particularly the praying assembly, strengthen the faith of practicing Christians and are a way to evangelize non-believers and those who do not practice. Yet, the ritual alone is not enough. A word of explanation is needed.
3. Being aware of the interconnection between the Eucharist and evangelization, we need to avoid the following two extremes: excessive focus on formal regulations and a full improvisation. We need to grasp the spirit of the liturgy as a whole and as a combination of individual parts. Ratzinger says: "We have to find a happy medium between a ritualism in which the liturgical action is performed in an unintelligible and nonrelational manner by the priest and a craze for understandability that in the end dissolves the whole into the work of men" (Ratzinger 2012, p. 242).
4. "At the beginning of this new century, our steps must quicken as we travel the highways of the world" (John Paul II 2001, no. 58). Therefore, the Church nowadays still faces the challenge of increasing the awareness of all dimensions of evangelization, so that the mission entrusted to us by Jesus is carried out ever more effectively<sup>28</sup>.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> It was already John XXIII who spoke of the need to have new expressions of faith, while preserving the unchangeable doctrine: "... occorre che questa dottrina certa ed immutabile, alla quale si deve prestare un assenso fedele, sia approfondita ed esposta secondo quanto è richiesto dai nostri tempi. Altro è infatti il deposito della Fede, cioè le verità che so no. contenute nella nostra veneranda dottrina, altro è il modo con il quale esse so no. annunziate, sempre però nello stesso senso e nella stessa accezione" ("What is needed is that this certain and unchangeable doctrine, to which loyal submission is due, be investigated and presented in the way demanded by our times. For the deposit of faith, the truths contained in our venerable doctrine, are one thing; the fashion in which they are expressed, but with the same meaning and the same judgement, is another thing.") (John XXIII 1962, p. 35).
- <sup>2</sup> See (Benedict XVI 2010, no. 98). "The Good News proclaimed by the witness of life sooner or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life. There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed" (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, no. 22 (Paul VI 1975)).
- <sup>3</sup> "At the dawn of the third millennium not only are there still many peoples who have not come to know the Good News, but also a great many Christians who need to have the word of God once more persuasively proclaimed to them, so that they can concretely experience the power of the Gospel. Many of our brothers and sisters are baptized, but insufficiently evangelized" (*Verbum Domini*, no. 96).

- 4 “The encounter with Christ, constantly intensified and deepened in the Eucharist, issues in the Church and in every Christian *an*  
urgent summons to testimony and evangelization. ( . . . ) The dismissal at the end of each Mass is a *charge* given to Christians, inviting  
5 them to work for the spread of the Gospel . . . ” (*Mane nobiscum Domine*, no. 24 (John Paul II 2004)).
- 6 Benedict XVI reminded us of the words from *Propositio* of the 11th Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: “As an element of  
the liturgy, song should be well integrated into the overall celebration. Consequently everything—texts, music, execution—ought  
to correspond to the meaning of the mystery being celebrated, the structure of the rite and the liturgical seasons” (*Sacramentum*  
*caritatis*, no. 42 (Benedict XVI 2007)).
- 7 It may be inspiring in this respect to hear Pope Francis saying that: “ . . . Some Christians spend their time and energy on these  
things, rather than letting themselves be led by the Spirit in the way of love, rather than being passionate about communicating  
the beauty and the joy of the Gospel and seeking out the lost among the immense crowds that thirst for Christ” (*Gaudete et*  
*exsultate*, no. 57 (Francis 2018)).
- 8 “ . . . it should be remembered that the power of the liturgical celebrations does not consist in frequently altering the rites, but in  
probing more deeply the word of God and the mystery being celebrated” (*Redemptionis sacramentum*, no. 39 (The Congregation  
for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacrament 2004)).
- 9 “Active participation in the eucharistic liturgy can hardly be expected if one approaches it superficially, without an examination  
of his or her life. ( . . . ) The faithful need to be reminded that there can be no *actuosa participatio* in the sacred mysteries without  
an accompanying effort to participate actively in the life of the Church as a whole, including a missionary commitment to bring  
Christ’s love into the life of society” (*Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 55 (Benedict XVI 2007)).
- 10 See *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 160–68 (Francis 2013).
- 11 See *Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 64. (Benedict XVI 2007).
- 12 See *Eucharisticum mysterium*, no. 24 (The Sacred Congregation of Rites 1967).
- 13 “ . . . In new churches, it is good to position the Blessed Sacrament chapel close to the sanctuary; where this is not possible, it is  
preferable to locate the tabernacle in the sanctuary, in a sufficiently elevated place, at the centre of the apse area, or in another  
place where it will be equally conspicuous. Attention to these considerations will lend dignity to the tabernacle, which must  
always be cared for, also from an artistic standpoint . . . ” (*Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 69). It is worth noting that this is Ratzinger’s  
view. It is possible to place the tabernacle not necessarily in close proximity to the chancel.
- 14 Ratzinger says that “the Eucharist brings together and creates a community of flesh and blood of people with Jesus Christ, that is  
with God and with other people. However, for this greatest gathering possibility to become reality, it must be preceded by a  
somewhat simpler stage—people need to step out of their private worlds and get together” (Ratzinger 2012, pp. 385–86).
- 15 See *General Introduction of the Roman Missal*, no. 31.50.105
- 16 “If somebody comes to the external sacramental Communion but in their heart has no. faith or love to Christ and no. love to  
brothers, and is not ready to forgive all ( . . . ), they give an external sign that is false, not corresponding to the internal beliefs and  
attitudes. This is sacrilegious Communion, as the external sign shows communion and unity, while in fact no. communion or  
unity exists” (Blachnicki 2015b, p. 86).
- 17 “My daughter, that when I come to a human heart in Holy Communion, My hands are full of all kinds of graces which I want to  
give to the soul. But souls do not even pay any attention to Me; they leave Me to Myself and busy themselves with other things”  
(Kowalska 2020, no. 1385). “Oh, how painful it is to Me that souls so seldom unite themselves to Me in Holy Communion. I wait  
for souls, and they are indifferent toward Me. ( . . . ) They treat Me as a dead object, whereas My Heart is full of love and mercy”  
(Ibid., no. 1447).
- 18 See *Instructio de missis pro coetibus particularibus*.
- 19 “Christ, truly present under the species of bread and wine, is analogously present in the word proclaimed in the liturgy” (*Verbum*  
*Domini*, no. 56).
- 20 “Given the importance of the word of God, the quality of homilies needs to be improved. The homily is ‘part of the liturgical  
action’, and is meant to foster a deeper understanding of the word of God, so that it can bear fruit in the lives of the faithful”  
(*Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 46).
- 21 See *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 135–59 (Francis 2013).
- 22 “On the basis of these fundamental statements of the Second Vatican Council, the Synod Fathers frequently stressed the  
importance of the active participation of the faithful in the eucharistic sacrifice. In order to foster this participation, provision may  
be made for a number of adaptations appropriate to different contexts and cultures.” (*Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 54).
- 23 “ . . . singing in the liturgy has priority over instrumental music, though it does not in any way exclude it. It goes without saying  
that the biblical and liturgical texts are the normative words from which liturgical music has to take its bearings. This does not  
rule out the continuing creation of “new songs” but, instead, inspires them and assures them of a firm grounding in God’s love  
for mankind and his work of redemption.” (Ratzinger 2019, p. 134).
- “It is disturbing to see that most priests and lay faithful got used to that and can see no problem in it. To them, the liturgy is still a  
domain of irrational religious experiences or magical incomprehensible rites. It is not a field where one must think and which is



to engage a man as a person, through rational awareness and free activity. It is sufficient to them that something *religious* is said, sung or done there” (Blachnicki 2015a, p. 58).

24 “Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy” (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 14 (II Vatican Council 1963)).

25 See Ibid., no. 59.

26 “The Lord’s day is the original feast day, and it should be proposed to the piety of the faithful and taught to them so that it may become in fact a day of joy and of freedom from work . . . ” (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 106 (II Vatican Council 1963)).

27 See *Directory on popular piety and the liturgy* (The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 2002).

28 The mission of the Church is “the joyful proclamation of a gift meant for all, and to be offered to all . . . ” (John Paul II 2001, no. 56).

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