

CATECHESIS IN LITURGY

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ABSTRAK

Tulisan ini hendak menjawab pertanyaan sentral: apakah di dalam pelaksanaan Liturgi ada unsur-unsur katekese. Apakah liturgi hanya berurusan dengan menjalin hubungan antara Allah dan manusia: Allah yang “turun” ke atas manusia dan melimpahkan karuniaNya ke atasnya, sedangkan manusia yang “menaikkan” berbagai corak doa kepada Allah serta para orang kudus? Ternyata – pada menyelidiki sejumlah acara liturgi – de facto dalam pelaksanaan liturgi, terdapatlah unsur-unsur katekese, bukan hanya untuk menjelaskan liturgi itu sendiri, melainkan juga katekese secara lebih “umum.” Dalam liturgi, katekese itu disodorkan dalam suatu konteks berupa pujian dan pertobatan, rahmat dan hiburan.

KATA KUNCI

Liturgy, Catechesis, Eucharist, Style, Gestures, Signs, Symbols.

1. Liturgy A Means of Catechesis?

What do we expect from Liturgy? According to the Second Vatican Council, through *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC): “Every liturgical action is an action of Christ the priest and of His Body which is the Church, a sacred action surpassing all others; no other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree” (SC 7). Through the liturgy Christ our redeemer and high priest continues the work of our redemption. In, with and through His Church, we have the opportunity to receive and be sanctified by grace. The liturgical life is the source and summit of the Christian life.

In Liturgy God’s people addresses itself to its Creator and Redeemer and – as we trust – God bestows his grace upon the true believers. According to John

Paul II in *Tertio Millennio*, “In Christ religion is no longer a blind search for God, but is the response of faith to God who reveals himself.”

In fact, from liturgy we do not expect any catechesis, except insofar the catechesis concerns the liturgical ceremony itself. “Instruction which is more explicitly liturgical should be given in a variety of ways; if necessary, short directives to be spoken by the priest or proper minister should be provided within the rites themselves. But they should occur only at the more suitable moments, and be in prescribed or similar words” (SC 35, art. 3).

Thus in liturgy supposedly there is only place for “liturgical catechesis” and not for “general catechesis”.

Nevertheless, it might be useful to explore whether – surreptitiously – general catechesis is present in a way that in liturgy the participants not only praise the Lord and open their hearts for His grace, but also experience increase of knowledge in matters of dogma, moral, liturgy in general etc.

2. Mutual Influence Between Liturgy and Catechesis

Liturgy and catechesis are in many ways connected and influence each other:

2.1. Impact of catechesis on liturgy

Serious catechesis often induces to prayer or liturgical / para-liturgical actions. It is intended to lead to proper understanding of the Sacraments, not only understanding of their history, their dogmatical and practical connotation, but also concerning the way by which they are properly administered or / and celebrated. Precisely by appropriate catechesis, the participation in Sacramental life and in other liturgical actions, is made possible and consequently enhanced.

Catechesis always should be oriented towards the liturgy. The faithful need to be comfortable living sacramentally. “The sacramental life is

impoverished and soon turns into hallow ritualism if it is not based on a serious knowledge of the meaning of the sacraments” (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 23).

If we are in a place of “hallow ritualism”, it will be very difficult to be converted at mass. Catechesis becomes intellectualized, if it fails to become alive in sacramental practice. If people are taught about baptism and not helped to understand what holy water has to do with baptism every time you enter a church, it can become a mere ritual.

We ought to be able to grow to a comprehensive understanding of the liturgy: The words of blessings, prayers, petitions and sacramental rites, clearly and beautifully express the faith of the Church. For instance as you read through the rite of confirmation, it is apparently the rite of maturity where we become adults in the faith.

2.2. Impact of Liturgy on Catechesis

The liturgy teaches us about our role in the mystical body of Christ. Active and realistic participation in the celebration of the Liturgy, will evoke wonder and awe.

In liturgy not seldom can be found explanatory songs, gestures, symbols and prayers, all of which intend to clarify certain elements of the liturgy, which is being performed, or liturgy in general, or even other religious aspects, like dogmatics. In short: *Lex orandi lex credendi*, which means: If you want to know what we believe, what is our religion, what is our vision on God and on our human condition: just have a look at the contents of our prayers. In those prayers we express our faith. It is this what we want to have a closer look at in this article.

Thus there is hardly a clear borderline between catechesis and liturgy, though basically these are quite different actions: catechesis is formation to be real christians, whereas liturgy deals with the spiritual connection of human beings with their Creator and Divine Redeemer. But the early Church already put

them together according to Acts 2:42 “They remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles . . . , to the breaking of bread and to the prayers”.

2.3. Samples of Explicate Catechesis in the Liturgy

If the Church prays as she believes (“lex orandi lex credendi”), then not only do we have the scriptures and the catechism as sources of knowledge of our faith: we can also go to the liturgy itself to know and understand the deposit of faith. We may even become aware that liturgy does more to draw people to conversion than even the very best catechesis. The liturgy will help to more and more understand the deposit of faith.

Can catechesis via Liturgy be justified? Is not in this way the holy liturgy being degraded to a mere vehicle for a lesson on religion? We can only answer this question after we will have seen some samples of catechesis that in reality occur in Liturgy.

2.3.1. The Divine Office / Officium Divinum

The divine Office which is supposed daily to be said by clerici and other religious, has a strong catechetical impact, mainly by both readings that are included. But also in other parts, not the least in psalms, there are traces of catechesis. To give just a sample: Psalm 15 in which – in the form of a prayer – rather elaborately is described what may be expected from a morally blameless person:

LORD, who may dwell in your sacred tent?

Who may live on your holy mountain?

The one whose walk is blameless,

who does what is righteous,

who speaks the truth from their heart;

whose tongue utters no slander,

who does no wrong to a neighbour,

and casts no slur on others;
 who despises a vile person
 but honors those who fear the Lord;
 who keeps an oath even when it hurts,
 and does not change their mind;
 who lends money to the poor without interest;
 who does not accept a bribe against the innocent.
 Whoever does these things
 will never be shaken.

2.3.2. The Holy Eucharist

2.3.2.1. Prefaces

These introductions to the Eucharistic prayer not seldom provide information and explanation on the mystery that is being celebrated, p.e. Preface of the Holy Spirit (I), where is clarified in what way the Holy Spirit descends upon man and who is included in this special favour. Namely: “Christ ascended to Heaven, was seated at God’s right hand; from there it was He that bestowed the Holy Spirit on those that had been selected by God to be his children”. In a similar way we can find catechetical elements in quite a number of other prefaces.



2.3.2.2. The Creed

The creed is not only a profession of faith, but also “rendering information” to those present, who might happen not to know these articles of faiths.

2.3.2.3. Eucharistic Prayers

In *the first eucharistic prayer* we are “informed” that

“On the day before Jesus was to suffer
 He *took bread* in his holy and venerable hands,
 and with *eyes raised to heaven*
 to You, o God, his almighty Father,
 giving you thanks He said the blessing, *broke the bread*
 and *gave it to his disciples*, saying:
 Take this, all of you, and *eat of it*, for *this is my Body*,
which will be given up for you.
 In a similar way, when supper was ended,
 He took this precious chalice
 in his holy and venerable hands,
 and once more giving you thanks, He said the blessing
 and *gave the chalice to his disciples*, saying:
 Take this, all of you, and *drink from it*,
 for *this is the chalice of my Blood*,
the blood of the new and eternal covenant,
which will be poured out for you and for many
for the forgiveness of sins.

These words have the form of a prayer to God. But God needn't be informed on all what is said here. Thus it is more a form of catechesis for those present in words, which are mainly taken from the Bible.

The *fourth Eucharistic Prayer* – especially the part before the Consecration – is not much different from an elaborate catechesis on the history of salvation, in the mode of a prayer. Its preface may not to be replaced by another preface, since it is dealing with the start of all of God's benevolence: He that “lives in unapproachable light... has created all things” and “leads man to the joyful vision of God's light”. After the *Sanctus*, the text expounds on the creation

of man as is described in Genesis, the first chapter. Then it tells about man's sin which is there called "disobedience" (rather than haughtiness).

2.3.2.4. Special Celebrations

Among Masses with a specific intention, we also often find elements of catechesis, apart from the kerugmal aspects of the Liturgy of the Word. An example of this is the annual blessing of the holy Chrism (*Sanctum Chrisma*) on Maundy Thursday (Holy Thursday) in the diocese's cathedral during "Chrism Mass:"

Very strongly permeated with catechesis is the Mass in which deacons are ordained priests. Allow us to provide a rather long quotation of a much longer text which is said by the presiding bishop. Taking as a starting point the texts of the readings which were proclaimed in the Liturgy of the Word, the bishop speaks to the candidates saying: "My brothers, the Church is the family of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. All baptized people are called to make Christ known as Savior and Lord, and to share in the renewing of his world. Now you are called to work as pastor, priest, and teacher, together with your bishop and fellow presbyters, and to take your share in the councils of the Church.

As a priest, it will be your task to proclaim by word and deed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to fashion your life in accordance with its precepts. You are to love and serve the people among whom you work, caring alike for young and old, strong and weak, rich and poor. You are to preach, to declare God's forgiveness to penitent sinners, to pronounce God's blessing, to share in the administration of Holy Baptism and in the celebration of the mysteries of Christ's Body and Blood, and to perform the other ministrations entrusted to you..." Mind that this is not a homily (which was already presented previously) but a prearranged liturgical text which is to be read as part of the prescribed liturgy.

2.3.3. The Sacrament of Baptism

Every Sacrament has its catechetical aspects. We restrict ourselves to the Sacrament of Baptism, specifically the baptism of an infant: While baptising the child, the celebrant (a priest or deacon) says: “N., I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. These words are by themselves explaining what is being done: not just bathing a child, but administering a divine mystery upon the little one.

The newly baptised one then is anointed with Holy Chrism; the Celebrant says: “God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has freed you from sin, given you a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and welcomed you into his holy people. He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation. As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, so may you live always as members of his body, sharing everlasting life”. All: “Amen”. *(Then the celebrant anoints the child on the crown of the head with the sacred chrism, in silence).*



The following rite is the clothing with the White Garment; meanwhile the celebrant says: “N., you have become a new creation, and have clothed yourself in Christ. See in this white garment the outward sign of your Christian dignity. With your family and friends to help you by word and example, bring that dignity unstained into the everlasting life of heaven”. All: “Amen”. *(The white garment is put on the child).* The Celebrant takes the Easter Candle and says: “Receive the light of Christ”. *(Someone from the family – such as the father or godfather – lights the child’s candle from the Easter Candle).* The Celebrant then says: “Parents and Godparents, this light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly. This child of yours has been enlightened by Christ. He (she) is to walk always as a child of the light. May he

(she) keep the flame of faith alive in his (her) heart. When the Lord comes, may he (she) go out to meet him with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom”.

2.3.4. Hymns

We present here some verses of the *Lauda Sion* hymn that apparently provide a concise “course” on dogmatical understanding of the Real Presence (*Realis Presentia*) of Christ in the appearance of Bread and Wine:

Here, for empty shadows fled,	Whether one or thousands eat:
Is reality instead,	All receive the self-same meat:
Here, instead of darkness, light.	Nor the less for others leave.
His own act, at supper seated	Both the wicked and the good
Christ ordain'd to be repeated	Eat of this celestial Food:
In His memory divine;	But with ends how opposite!
Wherefore now, with adoration,	Here 't is life: and there 't is
We, the host of our salvation,	death:
Consecrate from bread and wine.	The same, yet issuing to each
Hear, what holy Church	In a difference infinite.
maintaineth,	Nor a single doubt retain,
That the bread its substance	When they break the Host in
changeth	twain,
Into Flesh, the wine to Blood.	But that in each part remains
Doth it pass thy comprehending?	What was in the whole before.
Faith, the law of sight transcending	Since the simple sign alone
Leaps to things not understood.	Suffers change in state or form:
Here beneath these signs are	The signified remaining one
hidden	And the same for evermore.

Priceless things, to sense
forbidden,

Signs, not things, are all we see.

Flesh from bread, and Blood from
wine,

Yet is Christ in either sign,

All entire, confessed to be.

They, who of Him here partake,

Sever not, nor rend, nor break:

But, entire, their Lord receive.

Lo! bread of the Angels broken,

For us pilgrims food, and token

Of the promise by Christ spoken,

Children's meat, to dogs denied.

Shewn in Isaac's dedication,

In the manna's preparation:

In the Paschal immolation,

In old types pre-signified.

3. Impact of Style, Gestures, Signs and Symbols

3.1. Style

Liturgy is not only a matter of words: it involves also the WAY of its being celebrated. The way of pronouncing the words and sentences, the way in which – for instance – in Confession the words of the absolution are pronounced and the way the sign of the cross is made over the penitent. The apparent sincerity of the minister of all sacraments, the attitude while pronouncing prayers, the way in which during the Consecration the Host and the Chalice are raised: all of this is simultaneously a proclaiming of the faith. A still unpublished text, titled “Sejarah Gereja Katolik di Tanimbar 1910 – 2010” (*History of the Catholic Church in Tanimbar, 1910-2010*) describes the impression that the uncomprehensible silent Mass which was said in Latin made on the early converts. Precisely that mysterious way of words and gestures of the priest

while saying Mass made the people say in their own language: *Ratu ntompur tuan* (God descends upon the priest). They considered it most appropriate that God almighty was honoured in such mysterious way.

3.2. Symbols

There are many liturgical symbols that are utilized in catechesis and some even are explained during the liturgical celebration itself.

The basic symbol is the **word**. Many words are used throughout the liturgy. Some are explained “on the spot”. For instance, having read from the Scripture, the lector says: “This is the word of the Lord”, or simply “The word of the Lord” (*Verbum Domini*).



About the **Lamb of God** is explained that it “takes away the sins of the world”.

Also where the **bread** and **wine** come from (from God’s goodness, from the earth / vine, and from human labour), how it will function in the liturgical celebration (it will become “the bread of life” c.q. “our spiritual drink”).

Even the steps leading up to a church, show us that we are ascending to the heavenly liturgy. The church itself symbolizes Heaven. The altar is a symbol of Christ, who is simultaneously priest, sacrifice and altar. Liturgical colours have each their specific meaning, prayer is symbolized by incense. Various animals (lamb, pellicane, pigeon, fish, lion, ox, dragon etc. have each their meaning. Special and specified meanings can be found in the picture on the Easter Candle.

Well-known are also the monograms for “Iesus” and “Christus” which occur in liturgical decorations.



By all these symbols we connect liturgy, faith and life.

4. Conclusion

Not uncommon is the notorious prayer by the one who had his turn participating in the Prayer of the Faithful during Mass. He said: “Lord, yesterday morning, at 11.30 a.m., our dear fellow parishioner Mr. Robert N. was called to aeternal life. His burial probably will take place next Thursday at 3.00 p.m. . . .” - thus using a prayer to make an announcement to those present. This – of course – can never be justified. But that is not the way catechesis is delivered in liturgy. Indeed, in Liturgy is a lot of explanation, not only on the rite or the celebration itself, but also on general issues in the fields of moral and other ecclesiastical or Bible teaching. But the way it is presented is fundamentally different from making an announcement or performing formal teaching of religion like it is done in schools. In Liturgy this catechesis is embedded in praise and contrition, in grace and consolation. May realizing this, it enhance our liturgical involvement and direct our daily lives.