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The Paschal Mystery and Liturgical Spirituality

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This paper attempts to explain the Paschal Mystery and to show its relationship to liturgy. Furthermore, the connection between the Paschal Mystery, liturgical spirituality, and one's life is addressed.

An Explanation of the Paschal Mystery

The basis for the Paschal Mystery lies in the words of the apostle Paul: “Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection (Rom 6:3-5).¹ In other words, *united in baptism with Christ's dying and rising, one is called to “walk in newness of life”*² – to live in a new, right relationship with God, with others, and with the world.³

Enacting the Paschal Mystery in the Eucharist means *both remembering what Christ did and also identifying with it*.⁴ In other words, whenever a believer gathers for prayer and formation, such as each week during the Eucharist, they proclaim, celebrate, and sing the Paschal Mystery – the dying and rising of Christ – not only in their memory but also in relation to their everyday life.⁵

¹ Kenneth Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985), 2174.

² Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., *Holy Bible with the Apocryphal Deuterocanonical Books* (New York: HarperCollins, 1989), 209.

³ R. C. Duck, “Expansive Language in the Baptised Community”, in *Primary Sources of Liturgical Theology: A Reader*, ed. D. W. Vogel (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 287.

⁴ K. W. Irwin, “Conclusion: A Liturgical Eucharistic Spirituality”, in *Models of the Eucharist* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 310.

⁵ David Haas, “Proclaim Christ, Respond in Love, Serve with Gladness”, *Pastoral Music* 31 (April-May 2007, No. 4): 26.

The Paschal Mystery, then, refers to *what Christ accomplished, and continues to accomplish, in one's life* – in the successes and triumphs, as well as the shortcomings and defeats.⁶ All of life is viewed from the perspective of Christ's dying and rising.⁷ Human success is acknowledged, and also human failure for what it is – “an opportunity”, as Irwin notes, “to turn again and again to God in hope because of Christ's invitation to new life through him.”⁸

In sum, in the Paschal Mystery, the focus is on the Christ-event.⁹ Through the sacramental participation in dying and rising with Christ, one shares in a living relationship with God and participates in the very life of the Trinity.¹⁰ Or, stated universally, “by his incarnation, the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with everyone”, and “the Holy Spirit, in a manner known only to God, offers to everyone the possibility of being associated with the Paschal Mystery” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22).¹¹

The Relationship of the Paschal Mystery to Liturgy

In first differentiating between *Paschal Mystery* and *liturgy*, before exploring their inter-relationship, the term “mystery” refers to the heart of the action, that is, the redeeming work of the risen Lord, through the sacred actions he has decreed.¹² Liturgy, on the other hand, means the action of the church in conjunction with the saving action of Christ.¹³

⁶ Irwin, “Conclusion: A Liturgical Eucharistic Spirituality”, 310.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Shawn Madigan, *Liturgical Spirituality and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults: Forum Essays* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1997), 3-4.

¹⁰ Duck, “Expansive Language in the Baptised Community”, 287.

¹¹ Madigan, *Liturgical Spirituality and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, 4.

¹² Odo Casel, “Mystery and Liturgy”, in *Primary Sources of Liturgical Theology: A Reader*, ed. W. V. Dwight (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000) 31.

¹³ Ibid. Robert Taft in his book, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West: The Origins of the Divine Office and Its Meaning Today* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1986), addresses this aspect in a section entitled,

(This corresponds to the original sense of the word, “liturgy”, meaning “people’s work” or “service”.¹⁴) One could describe mystery as the act of the bridegroom, and liturgy as the act of the bride.¹⁵ However, “Christ and the church”, notes Casel, “work together inseparably in the mystery”.¹⁶

Christian liturgy is intrinsically paschal, because at the centre of the Christian tradition lie the memorial of Christ’s dying and rising, and our dying and rising, through, with, and in him.¹⁷

The local church, with its liturgy, embodies a new way of being human as it lives the transformation of the Paschal Mystery.¹⁸ For example, in celebrating baptism or the Eucharist, believers share in the saving reality of Christ’s death and resurrection.¹⁹ Through liturgy, then, the assembly glimpses the sacred promise of the messianic reign of Christ.²⁰ Symbols of the ordinary, such as bread, wine, oil, and water, become mediators of the extraordinary, the new creation in their midst.²¹ In sum, liturgy makes present the mystery of transformed reality which occurs in, with, and through Christ.²²

“Liturgy: A Work of the Church”. He states that “liturgy is an activity of the Church. It is one of the ways the Church responds in praise, surrender, thanksgiving, to the call of God’s revealing, saving word and deed . . . It is both God’s unending saving activity and our prayerful response to it in faith and commitment throughout the ages” (pp. 340-341).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Irwin, “Conclusion: A Liturgical Eucharistic Spirituality”, 308.

¹⁸ Madigan, *Liturgical Spirituality and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, 5.

¹⁹ Bruce Morrill, “Sacraments: Key Symbols for the Christian Way of Life”, *Assembly* 33 (March 2007, No. 2): 15.

²⁰ Madigan, *Liturgical Spirituality and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, 1.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

The different aspects of the Paschal Mystery are revealed in each of the liturgical seasons.²³ The different facets provide, note the Brislands, “the mystery and comfort of ritual that is familiar but not boring and empty”.²⁴

Madigan suggests that the inclusiveness implied in the Paschal Mystery – the incarnation, death, resurrection, and Pentecost events – provides hints of the content that liturgy should embrace.²⁵ One such hint is that liturgy should expand the vision of the future in God – that is, to widen the eschatological horizons of the Paschal Mystery.²⁶ Specifically, for example, the inclusion of all people in the Paschal Mystery²⁷ provides meaning of the eschaton, the ultimate future God has planned for humanity from the beginning.²⁸ In this context, the rising of Jesus, writes Madigan, “inaugurates a new sense of the present reign of God that opens out toward that ultimate embrace when Christ will be all in all.”²⁹

Finally, as another example of the relationship between the Paschal Mystery and liturgy, Lewinski writes of the Liturgy of Hours (LOH):

The LOH prepares us for Eucharist by cultivating within us the wider spectrum of prayer sentiments: thanksgiving, praise, adoration, mercy, compassion, petition, intercession, anamnesis as a remembering of God’s mighty deeds, etc. All of these dimensions are found in the Eucharistic Liturgy.³⁰

²³ Derek Brisland and Janice Brisland, “Celebration and Liturgical Spirituality: A Pastoral Commentary”, *Liturgical Ministry* 4 (Spring 1995): 85.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Madigan, *Liturgical Spirituality and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, 4-5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ R. Lewinski, “Liturgy of the Hours in the Parish: Part II – The Value of the Hours and a Pastoral Plan”, *Assembly* 33 (March 2007, No. 2): 12.

Likewise, the *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours* (12), states that the “Liturgy of the Hours is an excellent preparation for the celebration of the Eucharist itself, for it inspires and deepens in a fitting way the dispositions necessary for the fruitful celebration of the Eucharist: faith, hope, love, devotion and the spirit of self-denial.” In sum, the LOH provides an invaluable daily refocus on the mystery of Christ in a 12-month cycle.³¹

The Connection between Paschal Mystery, Liturgical Spirituality, and One’s Life

This section explores the inter-relationship between the Paschal Mystery and liturgical spirituality on the one hand and outcomes for one’s life on the other hand.³²

To begin with, the *Paschal Mystery* involves “sacramental living” – a way of life based on one’s baptismal union with Christ in living, dying, and rising.³³ Accordingly, disciples are those who have died and been raised to new life in Jesus, who have been made a part of His body, and who have been sent forth for witness and service.³⁴

The *heart of liturgical spirituality* is, according to Madigan, “the belief that the personal and communal journey to the fullness of the reign of God has its origin in an experience of the intimacy and infinity of the Paschal Mystery, which engenders a deep gratitude.”³⁵

³¹ R. Lewinski, “Liturgy of the Hours in the Parish: Part I”, *Assembly* 33 (Jan 2007, No. 1): 8.

³² K. Osborne, “Spirituality and Eucharist”, in *Spirituality for the 21st Century: Experiencing God in the Catholic Tradition* (Missouri: Ligouri, 2006), 74-75. In relation to the connection between Paschal Mystery, liturgical spirituality, and one’s life, Osborne states that a community of faith, Eucharistic celebration, and eucharistic spirituality are indeed intertwined. “Only on the basis of this fundamental Christian community and its subsequent celebration of the Eucharistic meal is there a possibility for Eucharistic spirituality. It is precisely this triadic relationship of spirituality, Eucharistic celebration, and a community of faith that constitutes the heart of this [section in the paper]”.

³³ Duck, “Expansive Language in the Baptised Community”, 294.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Madigan, *Liturgical Spirituality and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, 2.

This grateful attitude – the giving of thanks always “in the name of the Lord” – is nourished by the community’s liturgical celebrations.³⁶

Liturgical spirituality can express itself in rich diversity.³⁷ However, it also has fundamental characteristics. It is biblical, evangelical, communitarian, outward-looking, and concerned with building the Kingdom of God. (See also Rom 14:17-18.)³⁸ It is not a Christian spirituality that is predominantly focused on personal piety.³⁹ A spirituality that concentrates only on the inward religious experience of the believer is unbiblical and a deception.⁴⁰ Rather, than leading to simply a personal reception of Jesus, authentic liturgical spirituality leads to, as Brisland and Brisland write, “a community action of sharing bread that is blessed and broken so that all may be broken to become Bread for others.”⁴¹

The *celebration of the liturgy*, then, should lead all to feel included in sharing both the table of the Word and the table of Eucharist.⁴² To achieve this, a pastor needs to be able to relate to where people are in their faith journey, and most importantly, to connect Scripture to daily life.⁴³

³⁶ Ibid., 1.

³⁷ Brisland, “Celebration and Liturgical Spirituality, 88, 85.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid. Irwin in “Conclusion: A Liturgical Eucharistic Spirituality” concurs with the fact that genuine Christian spirituality is “diametrically opposed to any sort of preoccupation with the self.” His thesis is that “Eucharist is integral to and integrating of the Christian life” (p. 294).

⁴⁰ Ibid., 88.

⁴¹ Ibid. P. McCormick, “The Breaking of Bread”, in *A Banqueter’s Guide to the All Night Soup Kitchen of the Kingdom of God* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004) states that “when we celebrate the Eucharist we are not just being fed by God’s manna, we are being schooled in Jesus’ manners, and they challenge us to practice an ethic of hospitality, friendship, and service that imitates Christ, anticipates the heavenly banquet, and transforms the world we live in” (p. 41).

⁴² Ibid., 85.

⁴³ Ibid.

Henderson et al. aptly state:

If Sunday worship does not connect in some way with our experiences during the preceding week, then something is wrong. And if Sunday worship does not make a difference in our daily lives during the week that follows, something is wrong as well.⁴⁴

True participation in the liturgy that the Second Vatican Council called for (“full, conscious, and active”), is to intentionally participate in a manner that leads one into the *life of Christ* and the mission which is in partnership with Christ – through him, with him, and in him.⁴⁵ In other words, liturgical spirituality needs to be rooted in the Gospel – a spirituality that helps one to be conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others.⁴⁶ It is a spirituality of justice that is also biblical, ecclesial, and Eucharistic.⁴⁷

Furthermore, it is the Eucharist that draws the people of God into relationship with God, that transforms them, and that sends them out to be Eucharist to the world.⁴⁸ Each week they return to seek renewed inspiration and strength within the community to continue to build God’s Kingdom.⁴⁹ In other words, as Duck states, “the ministry of the baptized community is to love and care for all persons and all creation, to heal and not to harm, to bring justice, not to condone violence by our words or actions.”⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Brisland, “Celebration and Liturgical Spirituality, 87. Here Brisland and Brisland quote J. Frank Henderson, Kathleen Quinn, Stephen Larson, *Liturgy, Justice and the Reign of God: Integrating Vision and Practice* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 14.

⁴⁵ Haas, “Proclaim Christ, Respond in Love, Serve with Gladness”, 25.

⁴⁶ Brisland, “Celebration and Liturgical Spirituality, 88.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Duck, “Expansive Language in the Baptised Community”, 291.

Baptism can be offered as an example that demonstrates the connection between the Paschal Mystery, liturgical spirituality, and one's life. To begin with, in baptism, as Duck notes, "we are born anew into an alternate reality of love and mutuality beyond all human domination and subordination."⁵¹ Baptism into Christ means belonging to one another – rejoicing with those who rejoice, and weeping with those who weep (Rom 12:15).⁵² In other words, Christian faith is communal⁵³ and living sacramentally is to live out baptism every day in the world as those who belong to God and to one another.⁵⁴

In the past, traditional Western theologies of the sacraments focused on substance. Baptism, for instance, washed away original sin, as a substance (and the Eucharist communicated grace, as a substance).⁵⁵ Today, the sacraments are understood to emphasize both transformed and transforming relationships with God, with neighbour, and with the whole creation.⁵⁶ As Duck writes:

The life and witness of the worshipping community are an essential part of [the] baptismal journey . . . A relational view sees God's grace present in the world and interpersonally in the church in the dynamic of a loving, caring, forgiving, justice-seeking body of Christ.⁵⁷

Finally, attitudes and behaviours toward each other witness to the presence of Christ not just in the proclaimed Word and in the sacramental elements, but also as Haas notes, "in our encounter in the place where Christ primarily dwells: in the lives, struggles, joys, fears,

⁵¹ Ibid., 290.

⁵² Ibid., 292.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 294.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 286-287.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 292. Here Duck is quoting from Robert L. Browning and Roy A. Reed, *Models of Confirmation and Baptismal Affirmation* (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1995), 24.

anxieties, tears and hopes of *human beings*.”⁵⁸ Indeed, as Haas further enjoins: “Every time we gather – regardless of the moment, occasion, season, or feast – we are called to see Christ splendidly revealed in it all.”⁵⁹ In sum, liturgy cannot be simply restricted to a localized experience – rather, each member of the assembly is called to live the ritual moment in their daily lives.⁶⁰

The Appendix entitled, “The Paschal Mystery in Life”, is the author’s attempt to show how the Paschal Mystery is lived in one’s life.

⁵⁸ Haas, “Proclaim Christ, Respond in Love, Serve with Gladness”, 26.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁶⁰ Madigan, *Liturgical Spirituality and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, 1. Robert Taft in *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West* (p. 343) states that “the touchstone of our liturgy is whether or not it is being lived out in our lives. Is the symbolic moment symbolizing what we really are? Is our shared celebration of life a sign that we truly live in this way?”

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Appendix

THE PASCHAL MYSTERY IN LIFE

Broadly speaking, the Paschal Mystery refers to the series of final events in the life of Christ: (1) death, (2) time in the tomb, (3) resurrection, (4) ascension, and (5) Pentecost. At the heart of the Paschal Mystery lies the theme of Christ’s *dying and rising*. The table below presents a framework for seeing how the Paschal Mystery is encountered in one’s life.

Historical Time	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	40 Days After	50 Days After
Event	Death	Tomb	Resurrection	Ascension	Pentecost
Theme	Loss	Waiting	Hope	Letting go	Newness of life
Application	Identifying: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognize the crisis. ▪ Name what is lost. 	Sitting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sit with the loss. ▪ Realize there will be stages of grieving: denial, anger, bargaining, and depression. 	Accepting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accept the circumstances and situation. ▪ Catch glimpses of possibility within the loss. 	Letting go: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Let go of what has passed away. ▪ Avoid dwelling in the past – focus on the present. 	Receiving: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Receive new strength through the Spirit offered by grace. ▪ Accept new identity, new relationships, and new scenario.
Further Reflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognize loss: shortcomings, failures, hurts, pain, false self, and sin. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accept, embrace, and befriend the situation and circumstance of loss. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognize God’s grace, presence, and forgiveness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accept and embrace fully God’s grace – and forgive all others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Experience newness of life through the Spirit – forget the past because all things are now new.
Metaphor:	Caterpillar “dies”.	Caterpillar is in a cocoon: pupa stage	Butterfly begins to break out from the pupa.	Butterfly sits and stretches its wings – and then flies off into the sky.	Butterfly is fully free in its new existence!

