



ST. MARY  
Catholic Church

# Living Worship: Living Worship:

*Developing a Strong Liturgical Spirituality: Part 1*



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Why do you go to Mass each week? What drives you to stop what you're doing, trek across town—sometimes in extreme heat or inclement weather—and celebrate the Eucharist with your faith community? This question is closely tied to Liturgical Spirituality, which will be the topic of the next few editions of *Living Worship*.

When I was starting high school, I saw the world in black and white. Things were clearly right or wrong, with no in-between. With this immature and foolish worldview, I constantly judged others; I found faults in all things. At the time, I did not realize that what I thought of as a “holy view” of an “evil world” obscured and often obstructed my ability to see God in the everyday. With such an outlook on the world, I viewed the liturgy as a place of “refuge” from everyday life, a place separate from the dire things around me. I believed that when I went to Mass, I encountered a force of tremendous goodness that was not present in day-to-day life. I did *not* have a healthy Liturgical Spirituality.

Similarly, in an article on hospitality, Thomas Richstatter recalls a letter he received after writing another article entitled “Why I Go to Mass.” He recalls, “I received a letter informing me that ‘the reasons given in the article are all right, I guess; but you didn’t mention the main reason we go to Mass. We’ll rot in hell if we don’t!’”<sup>1</sup> Like the view of the liturgy as a refuge from the trials of everyday life, this comical anecdote conveys yet another unhealthy Liturgical Spirituality. In fact, I’d venture to say that attending Mass *solely* because it’s an obligation denotes the absence of *any* Liturgical Spirituality at all.

These two stories both illustrate what Liturgical Spirituality *isn't*, but they fail to tell us what Liturgical Spirituality *is*. Still, from these examples, we can draw two conclusions about a healthy Liturgical Spirituality:

- Liturgical Spirituality does *not* treat the liturgy as an escape from everyday life;
- Liturgical Spirituality views the liturgy as more than an obligation to be fulfilled.

To get beyond this, to the heart of what “Liturgical Spirituality” means, we first must understand the meanings of a couple of words. The first is “Liturgy,” typically translated as “the work of God’s people,” and the second is Eucharist, from the Greek word for “thanksgiving.” Nathan Mitchell relates the two words, “According to Paul, Christian life and worship are two sides of a coin. A single word summarizes the meaning of both: “thanksgiving” (Greek: *eucharistia*, “eucharist”).”<sup>2</sup> So, consider this formula: **If Liturgy is “the work of God’s people” and Eucharist is “thanksgiving,” then the work of God’s people is to live in constant, active thanksgiving.**

<sup>1</sup> Richstatter, Thomas. “The Ministry of Hospitality.” *America* 3 May 2004. 9 July 2007  
<[http://americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article\\_id=3570](http://americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=3570)> .

<sup>2</sup> Mitchell, Nathan. “The Spirituality of Christian Worship.” *Spirituality Today*. March 1982: 5-17.

Here we hit at the heart of “Liturgical Spirituality.” Consider again Nathan Mitchell’s image of the coin. Although the two sides, Christian life and Worship, may seem to be disparate ideas, they are contained within one coin, the coin of *eucharistia*, thanksgiving. Liturgical Spirituality does describe the spirituality of the liturgy (our celebration of thanksgiving), but it **also** describes the Christian way of life, living life in a “liturgical” way, in constant thanksgiving for the world and its people, for nature in its goodness, for all that we have. Simply put, “Liturgical Spirituality” describes living out the liturgy, our celebration of thanksgiving. In the weeks to come, we’ll move beyond this definition and discuss how the Liturgy forms our spirituality and how we can live lives of constant Thanksgiving in the world.

Paul J. Schutz  
Director of Worship