

The Reception of the Constitution *Sacrosanctum concilium* in Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter *Desiderio desideravi*

Recepcja konstytucji *Sacrosanctum concilium* w liście apostolskim
papieża Franciszka *Desiderio desideravi*

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Abstract: This article aims to present the reception of the doctrine on the liturgy as articulated in *Sacrosanctum concilium* 60 years after its promulgation. The primary source text chosen is Pope Francis' apostolic letter *Desiderio desideravi*, which illustrates the current teachings of the Church regarding the liturgy. Pope Francis, focusing mainly on the Eucharist, underscores the value of the liturgy for all the faithful. He demonstrates that the main theological principles of the conciliar constitution remain relevant and need to be continually deepened through formation 'to the liturgy' and formation 'through the liturgy'. The goal of participating in the liturgy is to experience a personal union with Jesus Christ and to immerse oneself in His Paschal Mystery. The liturgy is a gift that the Church has received selflessly from Christ, who is present in it and acts salvifically. The liturgy continues the priestly mission of Christ and makes present His Paschal Mystery. The true presence of Christ in the liturgy ensures its salvific efficacy.

Keywords: Jesus Christ, the Liturgy, the Second Vatican Council, Pope Francis, the Constitution on the Liturgy, the Apostolic Letter *Desiderio desideravi*, Presence, Love, Paschal Mystery

Abstrakt: Celem artykułu jest ukazanie recepcji nauki konstytucji o liturgii *Sacrosanctum concilium* 60 lat po jej uchwaleniu. Jako podstawowy tekst źródłowy został wybrany list apostolski papieża Franciszka *Desiderio desideravi*, ponieważ pokazuje on aktualne nauczanie Kościoła do-

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tyczące liturgii. Franciszek, koncentrując się na Eucharystii, ukazuje wartość liturgii dla wszystkich wiernych. Pokazuje, że główne założenia teologiczne soborowej konstytucji są wciąż aktualne i trzeba je wciąż pogłębiać przez formację „do liturgii” i formację „przez liturgię”. Celem uczestnictwa w liturgii jest doświadczenie osobowego zjednoczenia się z Jezusem Chrystusem i zanurzenie się w Jego misterium paschalnym. Liturgia jest darem, który Kościół otrzymał bezinteresownie od Chrystusa. Chrystus jest w niej obecny i zbawczo działa. Liturgia kontynuuje kapłańską misję Chrystusa i uobecnia Jego misterium paschalne. Prawdziwa obecność Chrystusa w liturgii zapewnia jej zbawczą skuteczność.

Słowa kluczowe: Jezus Chrystus, liturgia, Sobór Watykański II, Franciszek, Konstytucja o liturgii, List *Desiderio desideravi*, obecność, miłość, misterium paschalne

On December 4, 2023, we marked the 60th anniversary of the promulgation of the constitution on the liturgy, *Sacrosanctum concilium*. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, by issuing the first of the four major council constitutions, aimed to present the theological understanding of the liturgy and ensure that the proposed changes would lead the faithful to conscious and active participation in the liturgy. More than half a century since the liturgical constitution was issued, much has changed within the Church. After the initial years of euphoria surrounding the changes in the liturgy, subsequent reflections and questions emerged about whether the reform was necessary and if the right directions had been chosen. Today, we observe two pastoral and theological trends in response to the liturgical reform conducted at Vatican II. The first, certainly more numerous, fully accepts the recommendations of the liturgical constitution and strives to understand it more deeply and implement it into the life of the Church. The second, less numerous, rejects the liturgical reform, accusing it of sacrilege and claiming that it strips the liturgy of its beauty and the mystery of the celebrated miracle play.²

In this context, it is pertinent to examine Pope Francis' teachings on the liturgy. During an audience for the participants of the plenary session of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, the Pope stated, among other things, 'The Church will be all the more beautiful, the more it adheres to Jesus, and the liturgy remains the path to a renewed encounter with Him'. He

² There are numerous accusations, including a lack of fidelity to the Tradition of the Church, the introduction of new forms and methods for receiving Holy Communion, and the involvement of laypeople in liturgical services (particularly extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion). Critics also point to the infantilization of the liturgy, the removal of the sacred from the liturgy through the use of modern art in the architecture and decoration of churches, and the incorporation of contemporary songs during the liturgy. Additionally, there is a strong emphasis on the perceived rejection of the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist, viewing it instead as a fraternal feast, which some argue represents a Protestantization of the liturgy. While these issues merit a more extended discussion, they fall outside the scope of this article and do not pertain to its research focus.

also added, 'Without a renewed encounter with Christ, there can be no question of reforming the Church.'³ These words clearly indicate that the true reform of the Church will occur through the liturgy.

The aim of this article is to address the following questions: Was the liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council necessary, and how has the Church continued it after 60 years? Is this the right path to renewing the Church? The primary source for answering these research questions will be Pope Francis' apostolic letter *Desiderio desideravi*. This document was chosen as it represents the latest ecclesiastical thought on the liturgy. Furthermore, Pope Francis directly quotes the constitution *Sacrosanctum concilium* 18 times in his letter, and it also contains numerous indirect references to the teachings of the constitution. The comparative research conducted has identified three main themes demonstrating the reception of the liturgical constitution in Pope Francis' letter. Firstly, it is necessary to present the liturgy as a selfless gift from Christ to the Church. Secondly, it should be shown as a place of real encounter with the risen Christ. The discussion of these issues will illustrate the liturgy as a 'place' where Christ's salvific work is manifested.⁴

1. Liturgy as a Gift from Christ to the Church

The conciliar liturgical constitution, before indicating the methods and areas for liturgical reform, elucidates its nature and theology. It presents three stages of the history of salvation: the prophetic era, the time of Jesus (the fullness of time), and the time of the Church, positioning the liturgy among the historical events of salvation that began with the work of creation, found fulfillment in Jesus Christ, and continue in the time of the Church.⁵ Within this broad panorama of salvation history, the constitution defines liturgy as 'the fulfillment of the priestly function of Jesus Christ. In it, through visible signs, the sanctification of man is expressed and carried out in a manner specific to each sign, and the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, the Head with its members, exercises full public worship.'⁶

³ Francesco, *Discorso del Santo Padre Francesco ai partecipanti alla plenaria del Dicastero per il Culto Divino e la Disciplina dei Sacramenti*, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2024/february/documents/20240208-plenaria-culto-divino.html?fbclid=IwAR2fk6PL-LhRo9JAlveqRyo9z9cLU4EC6GInuyzE1JkAY8m0v7R7tO1wgLc> [accessed: 15.2.2024].

⁴ Pope Francis' letter primarily focuses on the Eucharist, yet it also contains numerous references relevant to the entire liturgy of the Church.

⁵ Cf. Sobór Watykański II, Konstytucja o liturgii świętej *Sacrosanctum concilium*, in: Sobór Watykański II, *Konstytucje, Dekrety, Deklaracje*, Poznań 2002, nos. 5–7 [further: KL].

⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 7.

The aforementioned theological definition of liturgy emphasizes the primacy of the action of Jesus Christ, who continues His priestly mission through the liturgy. The entire earthly activity of Jesus was of a priestly nature, which imparts a saving dimension that is timeless and cosmic. These actions persist perpetually within the Church, with the liturgy serving as the special 'place' of their real presence. As the renowned Italian liturgist states, 'time is overcome and as if stopped', whereby Christ, His Sacrifice, His sanctifying power, His prayer, and His intercessory function towards the Father become truly and physically present through the medium of tangible signs.⁷ It is crucial to emphasize that liturgical celebrations are not merely a repetition or historical commemoration of Christ's saving work. Rather, they are always a holy action that renders the individual redeeming events, accomplished once and for all, truly present here, now, and for us.⁸

Identifying Christ as the primary agent of the liturgy implies that the liturgy is a gift He has bestowed and will continue to bestow upon the Church until the end of time. Therefore, the constitution states that 'each liturgical celebration, as an action of Christ the Priest and His Body, i.e., the Church, is a supremely holy action, the effectiveness of which, by the same title and to the same degree, no other action of the Church has.'⁹ This definition of the liturgy clearly demonstrates that it is a continuous saving dialogue between the Bridegroom and the Bride. This dialogue encompasses the so-called descending current in the liturgy, which represents Christ's redeeming action, and the ascending current, which is the Church's response to the gift of salvation realized in the liturgical celebration. It is important to note that the saving action of Christ, characterized by its selfless and spousal nature, always takes precedence.¹⁰

⁷ C. Vagaggini, *Il senso teologico della liturgia*, Roma 1965, p. 261.

⁸ Cf. K. Konecki, *Główne założenia teologiczne Konstytucji o liturgii świętej*, 'Liturgia Sacra' 19 (2013) 2, p. 246.

⁹ KL, no. 7.

¹⁰ Closing the second session of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI emphasized the significance of promulgating the constitution on the liturgy. He highlighted that the liturgy holds a primary place in the life of the Church due to its nature and dignity. He stressed that the sacred liturgy is the original source of the divine exchange in which God's life is transmitted to us. It is the foremost gift that the Church should offer to the People of God and an invitation to all humanity to glorify God (cf. Paweł VI, *Zamknięcie Soboru Watykańskiego II, Alokucja na uroczystości zamknięcia Soboru Watykańskiego II dnia 3 grudnia 1965 r.*, 'L'Osservatore Romano', 8.12.1965, accessible at https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/pawel_vi/przemowienia [accessed: 20.2.2024]). Cf. D. Kwiatkowski, *Liturgia wydarzeniem zbawczym w czasie Kościoła na podstawie Konstytucji „Sacrosanctum concilium”*, 'Ateneum Kapłańskie' 160 (2013) 3(625), pp. 427–430. The gratuity of the liturgy is further emphasized in *Katechizm Kościoła katolickiego*, which underscores that the liturgy is primarily the work of the Holy Trinity (1077–1109). According to the Catechism, the sacraments effectively realize the grace of Christ through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit (1084). The liturgy highlights the Holy Spirit as a selfless gift of the Holy Trinity. Speaking about His role in the liturgy, the Catechism states, 'In the liturgy, the Holy Spirit is the educator of the

Recalling the key theological ideas of the liturgical constitution allows us to understand how Pope Francis interprets these concepts almost 60 years later. In the first part of his letter, the Holy Father emphasizes, particularly in the context of the Eucharist, that it is a selfless gift that Christ left to the Church. It is Jesus who ardently desires to eat this Passover with His disciples before He suffers (cf. Lk 22:15). Referring to Luke's account of the institution of the Eucharist and quoting the words of Jesus preparing for this event, Francis states, 'The words of Jesus, with which the account of the Last Supper begins, are a ray through which we receive an astonishing opportunity to sense the depth of the love of the Persons of the Holy Trinity for us.'¹¹ He further denotes that although only Peter and John were sent to prepare the Supper, the entire creation and the entire history of salvation were a preparation for this unique and unrepeatable event. The Pope notes that the Last Supper was a surprise for Christ's disciples, yet their participation in the Supper was essential,

Peter and the others are at this table unaware and yet indispensable; every gift, in order to be a gift, must have someone willing to receive it. In this case, the disproportion between the greatness of the gift and the smallness of the one who receives it is infinite and cannot help but surprise us. Despite this—thanks to the Lord's mercy—this gift is entrusted to the Apostles to be carried to every person.¹²

In this part of the document, the Pope does not directly quote the conciliar liturgical constitution. However, it is difficult not to see a reference here to the statement from the constitution, 'From the liturgy, and especially from the Eucharist, as from a source, grace flows upon us and with the greatest effectiveness comes the sanctification of people in Christ and the glorification of God, to whom, as the goal, all other activities of the Church are directed.'¹³

faith of the People of God, the author of the "wonderful works of God", which are the sacraments of the New Covenant. It is the desire and work of the Spirit in the heart of the Church that we live the life of the Risen Christ' (1901). See D. Kwiatkowski, *Recepcja Konstytucji o liturgii „Sacrosanctum concilium” w „Katechizmie Kościoła katolickiego”*, 'Liturgia Sacra' 19 (2013) 2, pp. 283–286. Earlier, the Catechism clearly states that the liturgy is the work (ergon) of God accomplished by Christ the High Priest and continued by Him in the Church. In the liturgy, the work of the redemption of humanity is continued by Christ in the Church, with the Church, and by the Church (cf. 1069). See D. Kwiatkowski, *Zbawcza obecność Chrystusa w liturgii*, in: *Chrystus w liturgii*, red. B. Kochaniewicz, D. Kwiatkowski, (Colloquia Disputationes 47), Poznań 2019, p. 82.

¹¹ Franciszek, List apostolski *Desiderio desideravi* do biskupów, prezbiterów i diakonów, osób konsekrowanych i wiernych świeckich o formacji liturgicznej Ludu Bożego, Poznań 2022, 2 [further: DD].

¹² *Ibid.*, no. 3.

¹³ KL, no. 10. See P. Marini, *Sacrosanctum concilium 40 anni dopo. Tra consegne e impegni permanenti*, 'Rivista liturgica' 41 (2004), no. 5, p. 774. However, in the directives concerning the

Pope Francis emphasizes the gratuitous nature of the Eucharist later in the letter, writing, ‘No one deserved a place at this Supper; everyone was invited, or rather attracted, by Jesus’ ardent desire to eat this Passover with them.’¹⁴ He adds, ‘We cannot enter the Cenacle except by the attracting power of His desire to eat this Passover with us: *Desiderio desideravi hoc Pascha manducare vobiscum, antequam patiar* (Luke 22:15).’¹⁵ In a broader sacramental context, this statement by the Pope applies to each sacrament and the entire liturgy of the Church. The Council’s liturgical constitution, in defining the liturgy, clearly indicates that it is the fulfillment of the priestly function of Jesus Christ. Therefore, every liturgical celebration has its beginning and source in Jesus and His salvific action.¹⁶ The participation of the faithful in the liturgy is a consequence of the invitation that flows from Jesus’ desire to lead humanity to original communion with God. Pope Francis writes that the primary reason for the faithful to participate in the liturgy is that they are drawn to it by Jesus’ desire to meet each person and grant them salvation. In the context of the Eucharist and the Paschal events made present within it, Francis states, ‘For our part, the possible response—the most demanding asceticism—is, as always, to surrender to His love, to allow ourselves to be attracted by Him. Certainly, our entire communion with the Body and Blood of Christ was desired by Him at the Last Supper.’¹⁷

Pope Francis views the Church’s liturgy as an antidote to the poison of spiritual worldliness, which includes Gnosticism and Neo-Pelagianism.¹⁸ These distortions hinder the proper understanding of the liturgy and prevent the faithful

reform of the liturgy of the Holy Mass, the constitution emphasizes that the Eucharist was instituted by Christ during the Last Supper. The Eucharistic Sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ encompasses all ages until the Parousia, signifying the event of Jesus’ death and resurrection. It serves as a sacrament of mercy, a manifestation of love, a communion of love, and a Paschal banquet during which we receive Christ, replenish our souls with grace, and receive a promise of future glory (cf. no. 47).

¹⁴ DD, no. 4. A commentary on Francis’ words may be found in the statement of John Paul II as presented in the encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*: ‘The Church received the Eucharist from Christ, its Lord, not as one of many gifts, but as the greatest gift, because it is a gift from Himself, from His own person in His holy humanity, as well as the gift of His work of salvation’ (Jan Paweł II, *Encyklika „Ecclesia de Eucharistia” o Eucharystii w życiu Kościoła*, Poznań 2003, no. 11).

¹⁵ DD, no. 20.

¹⁶ Cf. KL, no. 7.

¹⁷ Cf. DD, no. 6.

¹⁸ Pope Francis addressed these issues in his apostolic exhortations, *Evangelii gaudium* and *Gaudete et exsultate*. Franciszek, *Adhortacja apostolska Evangelii gaudium o głoszeniu Ewangelii w dzisiejszym świecie*, Kraków 2014, nos. 93–97; Franciszek, *Adhortacja apostolska „Gaudete et exsultate”*, Rzym 2018, no. 35. See A. Bohdanowicz, *Eucharystia jako remedium na zagrożenia ze strony współczesnego sekularyzmu*, in: *Magisterium Kościoła wobec współczesnych wyzwań teologicznych*, (Teologia dogmatyczna 18), red. P. Kiejkowski, Poznań 2023, pp. 91–110.

from enjoying its fruits. Individualism in the approach to the liturgy (Gnosticism) and the belief in the possibility of achieving salvation through one's own efforts (Neo-Pelagianism) close individuals off from liturgical gifts. Francis writes,

Participating in the Eucharistic Sacrifice is not our achievement, as if it could be boasted about before God and our brothers and sisters. The beginning of each celebration reminds me of who I am, asking me to confess my sin and inviting me to implore the Most Holy Ever Virgin Mary, the angels, the saints and all my brothers and sisters to pray to the Lord for me. We are certainly not worthy to enter His house; we need His word to be saved (cf. Mt. 8:8).¹⁹

He further adds, 'The encounter with God is not the fruit of an individual, interior search for Him, but is a gifted event: through the new fact of the Incarnation we can encounter God who, at the Last Supper, goes so far as to want to be eaten by us. How could we have the misfortune to miss the fascination of the beauty of this gift?'²⁰

The council's constitution, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, after presenting the theology of the liturgy and its significance in the life of a Christian, emphasizes the need for the liturgical education of the faithful to ensure their active participation in the liturgy. Fruitful participation in the liturgy requires the faithful's conscious and active engagement in liturgical rites. By virtue of their baptism, all the faithful share in the priestly mission of Christ, which justifies and supports their full involvement in the liturgical life of the Church. The constitution insists that pastors, through diligent and proper education, zealously strive to ensure such participation for the faithful in the liturgy.²¹ In this context, aware of the magnitude of the gift received, Pope Francis highlights the need for liturgical formation, 'Since the gift of the mystery celebrated exceeds our ability to know, this commitment will certainly have to accompany the constant formation of each one, with the humility of the little ones, through an attitude of openness to wonder.'²² Only formation in and through the liturgy, encompassing both clergy and laity, will enable us to appreciate the value and greatness of the gift that is the Church's liturgy.

¹⁹ DD, no. 20.

²⁰ Ibid., no. 24.

²¹ Cf. KL, nos. 11; 14–20.

²² DD, no. 38.

2. Liturgy as a Place of Encounter with Christ²³

Pope Francis, in his letter *Desiderio desideravi*, identifies the liturgy as the locus of encounter with Christ. This assertion directly aligns with the teaching of the conciliar constitution *Sacrosanctum concilium*, which portrays the liturgy as the realization of the priestly function of Jesus Christ, indicating specific forms of His presence. In Article 7 of the constitution, it is stated,

To accomplish such a great work, Christ is always present in His Church, especially in liturgical activities. He is present in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass both in the person of the celebrant [...] and especially under the Eucharistic species. He is present with His power in the sacraments, so that when someone baptizes, Christ Himself baptizes. He is present in His word [...]. He is present when the Church prays and sings the psalms.²⁴

The continuation of Christ's priestly function naturally corresponds with His real presence. It is noteworthy, in light of the Gospel, that Jesus' entire life was characterized by liturgical activity. Through His teachings and redemptive deeds, He reconciled humanity with God (cf. Rom 5:10) and offered Himself as an atonement for humanity (cf. Mt. 26:28; Heb. 7:27; 9:11).²⁵ Before His ascension into heaven, Christ, imparting His power to His disciples, commissioned them to proclaim the Gospel and administer the sacraments throughout the world (cf. Mk 16:15–18). In this manner, through the proclamation of the word and the administration of the sacraments, Christ assured and guaranteed His presence on earth until the end of time.²⁶

The council's doctrine concerning the presence of Christ in the liturgy underscores its totality. In the liturgy, Christ as a Person and His redemptive work coexist. It is important to highlight that this presence manifests the paschal and glorified aspect of Christ. This glorified presence becomes tangible and substantial through liturgical symbols. Christ's presence in the liturgy renders Him a dynamic symbol of the presence and activity of God the Father. In this context, He is understood as the sacrament of God the Father. Moreover, in the liturgy, Christ serves as the sole Mediator between God and humanity. The

²³ M. Olczyk, *Liturgia drogą asymilacji owoców odkupienia. Perspektywa teologicznomoralna*, in: *Magisterium Kościoła wobec współczesnych wyzwań teologicznych*, (Teologia dogmatyczna 18), red. P. Kiejkowski, Poznań 2023, pp. 111–116.

²⁴ KL, no. 7.

²⁵ Cf. B. Nadolski, *Liturgika fundamentalna. Liturgika*, vol. I, Poznań 1989, pp. 12–13.

²⁶ Cf. S. Marsili, *La liturgia, momento storico della salvezza*, in: *La liturgia, momento nella storia della salvezza*, a cura di B. Neunheuser, S. Marsili, M. Augé, R. Civil, vol. I, Genova 1992, pp. 95–97.

complete turning of God towards humanity in the Person of Jesus Christ during the liturgy is denoted as the descending or salvific movement. Conversely, the Church's response to God's redeeming action is characterized as an ascending or laudatory current.²⁷

In his letter *Desiderio desideravi*, Pope Francis repeatedly underscores the genuine presence of Christ in the liturgy. Commencing with the descent of the Holy Spirit, the Church's liturgy affords the opportunity to encounter Jesus, hear His teachings, and witness His actions. Within it, the Church continually commemorates and actualizes the most precious mandate of Jesus, 'Do this in memory of me.'²⁸ In this vein, Francis strongly emphasizes,

From the outset, the Church was cognizant that this was not a mere representation of the Lord's Supper, albeit sacred. It would be inconceivable, particularly under the watchful gaze of Mary, the Mother of the Lord, to 'stage' this most sublime moment of the Master's life. From its inception, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, the Church comprehended that what was visible in Jesus—His words, gestures, the tangible reality of the Incarnate Word—was transferred to the celebration of the sacraments.²⁹

The presence of Christ in the liturgy ensures that His disciples are not left alone within the Church in their pursuit of understanding the mystery of God,

²⁷ Cf. D. Kwiatkowski, *Zbawcza obecność...*, p. 81. *Katechizm Kościoła katolickiego*, published much later, underscores the spousal dimension of Christ's presence in the liturgy. Initially, it highlights the liturgy as 'God's work', accomplished by Christ in accordance with the Father's will (no. 1069). Subsequently, it accentuates the spousal aspect of Christ's presence in the liturgy. Christ's spousal union with His Church emanates from His sanctifying activity and the worship He offers to God the Father in conjunction with His bride (cf. nos. 1088–1089). However, the portrayal of Christ's presence in the liturgy is articulated as follows, 'Christ, "seated at the right hand of the Father" and bestowing the Holy Spirit upon His Body, the Church, now operates through the sacraments He instituted to impart grace. Sacraments are perceptible signs (words and actions) intelligible to humans. They efficaciously actualize the grace they signify through the agency of Christ and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit' (no. 1084). Consequently, it can be asserted that the Church's sacraments serve as an extension of the deeds enacted by Jesus during His earthly ministry (cf. no. 1115). They function akin to 'virtues emanating' from the Body of Christ, remedying individuals of the wounds inflicted by sins and endowing them with abundant life. Cf. S. Czerwik, *Pojęcie liturgii według dokumentów reformy soborowej i nowego Katechizmu Kościoła katolickiego*, in: *Misterium liturgii w Katechizmie Kościoła katolickiego*, red. J.J. Kopeć, H. Sobeczko, R. Pierskała, Opole 1995, p. 20.

²⁸ Cf. DD, no. 8. The liturgical memorial constitutes an anamnesis, which denotes the representation and realization of particular salvific occurrences. See H.B. Meyer, *Anamnese. Liturgisch*, in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, hrsg. v. W. Kasper et al., Bd. 1, Freiburg–Basel–Wien 2009, k. 592–593. D. Brzeziński, *The Salvific Dimension of Time in the Christian Liturgy*, 'Verbum Vitae' 38 (2020) 1, pp. 329–351. B. Nadolski, *Leksykon liturgii*, Poznań 2006, pp. 85–89.

²⁹ Ibid., no. 9.

but instead, the liturgy gathers them together, leading them hand in hand into the mystery revealed to us through the Word and sacramental signs. It does so in alignment with God's action, following the trajectory of the incarnation, employing symbolic bodily gestures that extend to encompass elements of materiality, space, and temporality.³⁰

The primary objective of liturgical celebrations is to guide individuals towards a genuine encounter with the Paschal Christ. The Pope underscores that 'Christian faith either entails a living encounter with Him or it does not.'³¹ The liturgy guarantees the possibility of such an encounter in the current stage of salvation history. Were the liturgy unable to facilitate a genuine encounter with the Risen Christ, it would imply that the 'novelty of the Word made flesh' had been exhausted. The Pope attributes the potential for encountering Christ in the liturgy to the mystery of the Incarnation, which stands not only as the singular new event in history but also as the distinct method chosen by the Holy Trinity to establish the pathway for humanity's communion with God.³²

The potential for encountering Christ should be understood within the framework of all the sacraments. They afford us 'the opportunity to encounter the Lord Jesus and experience the power of His Paschal sacrifice. The redemptive potency of Jesus' sacrifice, embodied in His every word, gesture, glance, and sentiment, reaches us through the celebration of the sacraments.'³³ This encounter occurs within the liturgical *hodie, hic et nunc*. The liturgy thus becomes a temporal-spatial dimension for encountering Christ and communing with Him.³⁴ As the community of Pentecost, celebrating the liturgy, the Church firmly believes that Christ lives and is present through His word, gestures, and the offering of His Body and Blood. Consequently, every liturgical celebration serves as a privileged locus for encountering the Risen Christ.³⁵

³⁰ Ibid., no. 20.

³¹ Ibid., no. 10.

³² Cf. *ibid.*

³³ Ibid., no. 11.

³⁴ Cf. M. Olczyk, *Liturgia...*, pp. 113–116.

³⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, no. 33. At this juncture, it is pertinent to concur with T. Nawracała's observations regarding the translation of the papal letter into Polish. In his article, he remarks that: 'The conjunction "a" in brackets in the Polish text introduces the opposite sentence. The implication would be that between the Eucharist and other modes of Christ's presence, there exists some form of opposition suggesting equality. In the Word of God, in the person of the priest, in the community of the Church, Christ is as present as in the Eucharist. Even as we seek inspiration from the conciliar Constitution on the liturgy, we should refrain from attributing to it something that is not stated therein. The Council Fathers assert, "Christ is always present in His Church, especially in liturgical celebrations. He is present in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass both in the person of the celebrant [...] and especially [tunc maxime] under the Eucharistic species. He is present with His power in

3. Liturgy: Presence and Participation in Christ's Salvific Work

The liturgy serves not only as a venue for an authentic encounter with Jesus but also as the manifestation and actualization of the Savior's redemptive actions. In this era of salvation history, known as the time of the Church, the entirety of salvation history is manifested in the liturgy.³⁶ At the heart of this narrative lies the Paschal Mystery of Christ. It is through the mystery of the Incarnation and the public ministry of Christ that the Paschal mysteries find their culmination in His passion, death, resurrection, Ascension, and the Descent of the Holy Spirit.³⁷

The constitution delineates the essence and content of the mission entrusted to the Apostles, emphasizing its significance, 'Through His death and resurrection, the Son of God liberated us from the dominion of Satan and death, ushering us into the kingdom of the Father. To fulfill this salvific mission they preached, they also celebrated through the Sacrifice and the sacraments, around which the entire liturgical life revolves.'³⁸ The apostles diligently carried out this mission from the onset of their ministry. The Acts of the Apostles provide a blueprint of apostolic service concerning the sacraments of Christian initiation, comprising three fundamental components: the proclamation of the kerygma, conversion and profession of faith, and the administration of the sacraments (see Acts 2:14–40; 8:26–40; 10:1–48; 16:16–34). The Paschal Mystery of Christ consistently occupied the central position in their preaching (kerygma). Conversion and faith in the Paschal Christ culminated in the reception of the sacraments and integration into the Church community. *Sacrosanctum concilium* echoes this pattern and elucidates its realization in the liturgy, 'Through baptism, individuals are incorporated into the Paschal Mystery of Christ: united with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection, they receive the spirit of adoption [...]. Similarly, whenever they partake of the Lord's Supper, they proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.'³⁹

the sacraments". Among the various modes of Christ's presence, there exists not mere equality, but a certain distinction: He is most fully present in the Eucharist. Hence, the Italian text of *Desiderio desideravi* features no conjunction at this juncture, but merely a comma.' T. Nawracała, *Znaczenie sakramentów w historii zbawienia w ujęciu „Desiderio desideravi”*, in: *Magisterium Kościoła wobec współczesnych wyzwań teologicznych*, (Teologia dogmatyczna 18), red. P. Kiejkowski, Poznań 2023, s. 136. The author cites KL no. 7 and the Italian text of the papal letter: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/apost_letters/documents/20220629-lettera-ap-desiderio-desideravi.html [accessed: 30.3.2023].

³⁶ The constitution *Sacrosanctum concilium* delineates the history of salvation into three epochs: the prophetic era, the period of Christ (the fullness of times), and the era of the Church. See KL no. 5.

³⁷ Cf. S. Czerwik, *Wprowadzenie do Konstytucji o liturgii świętej*, in: Sobór Watykański II, *Konstytucje...*, pp. 31–33.

³⁸ KL, no. 6.

³⁹ Ibid.

The liturgy represents the actualization of the entire narrative of salvation within the era of the Church. While asserting that the Paschal event serves as the fulfillment and focal point of salvation history, it is crucial to underscore that it entails not only a historical occurrence but also a ritual that renders this event present. By highlighting the salvific significance of Christ's life and deeds, the constitution references the Paschal Mystery, implying the existence of a ritual, as the mystery itself is a rite characterized by the presence of a redemptive event once realized in history. Consequently, contemporary salvation finds expression through ritualistic symbols, enabling all participants in the rite to partake in and experience it. Engaging in a ritual celebration fosters communion with Christ.⁴⁰

The theological framework of the liturgy as delineated in *Sacrosanctum concilium* finds resonance and elaboration in the teachings of Pope Francis, as articulated in his apostolic letter *Desiderio desideravi*. The Pope introduces the Paschal dimension of the liturgy at the outset of the letter, recalling Christ's poignant words to the disciples prior to the Last Supper, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Pasch with you before I suffer' (Lk 22:15).⁴¹ Notably, Peter and John, dispatched to prepare the Passover, were neither anticipating nor cognizant of the significance of the impending Supper. Pope Francis elucidates that 'upon closer examination, the entirety of creation, the entirety of history, serves as a splendid prelude to this Supper.'⁴² Moreover, all of this was a prelude to the events of that Supper and to what it foreshadowed'. The Pope reaffirms this notion later in the letter, affirming, 'The essence of the broken bread symbolizes the cross of Jesus, His sacrificial act in obedient love to the Father.'⁴³ Subsequently, as Christ reveals Himself to the disciples and distributes bread to them, He concurrently 'dispels their spiritual blindness induced by the horror of the cross, enabling them to "perceive" the Risen One and embrace faith in the Resurrection.'⁴⁴ The Eucharist, which renders present the death and resurrection of Jesus, thereby enacts and embodies His Paschal Mystery.

The inaugural encounter with the Paschal Mystery of Christ occurs within the sacrament of baptism. The Pope fervently underscores that this transcends mere theological constructs, which might confine baptism to intellectual assent to Jesus and adherence to His moral precepts. Baptism is not a superficial ritual; rather, it confers upon the individual a genuine and profound 'immersion in His passion,

⁴⁰ Cf. L. Maldonado, P. Fernández, *La celebrazione liturgica: fenomenologia e teologia della celebrazione*, in: *La celebrazione nella Chiesa. Liturgia e sacramentaria fondamentale*, a cura di D. Borobio, vol. I, Torino 1992, pp. 317–326.

⁴¹ DD, no. 2.

⁴² Ibid., no. 3.

⁴³ Ibid., no. 7.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

death, resurrection, and ascension.⁴⁵ The potential for sacramental immersion in the Paschal Mystery of Christ, actualized within the liturgy, is elucidated by the Pope through the invocation of blessing upon the baptismal water. Francis underscores that God ordained water specifically for the sacrament of baptism. Every Old Testament narrative concerning water heralds the Paschal Mystery of Christ, culminating in His death and resurrection. The recollection of water mingled with the blood of Christ, flowing from His side pierced on the cross, and its association with the bestowal of the Holy Spirit, attests to the creation of a profound sacrament for the entire Church.⁴⁶

Within the broader framework of the Church's liturgy, Pope Francis revisits the teachings of the conciliar constitution on liturgy and, with slight modification, affirms,

The liturgy embodies the priesthood of Christ, disclosed and bestowed upon us in His Pasture, actualized and operational in the present through tangible symbols (water, oil, bread, wine, gestures, words). Through these visible signs, the Holy Spirit immerses us in the Paschal Mystery, effecting a transformative impact upon our entire existence, progressively conforming us to the likeness of Christ.⁴⁷

The liturgy, with its intrinsic 'substance', accompanies believers throughout their life's journey. Thus, Francis observes, 'Our existence transcends a haphazard and disjointed succession of events, evolving instead as a pilgrimage from Pascha to Pascha, shaping us in His image, as we "agerly anticipate the advent of our Savior, Jesus Christ, with hope".'⁴⁸

Conclusions

Pope Francis' letter presents the liturgy, particularly the Eucharist, as a divine gift bestowed upon the Church. This gift arises from God's selfless love for humanity. The liturgy derives its saving efficacy from the presence and action of Christ, characterized by profound care and love for the salvation of each individual. The liturgy not only realizes Christ's presence but also actualizes His Paschal Mystery. The sacrament of baptism immerses a person into Christ's Pasch, and subsequently, we participate in the Paschal events through other sacraments. Undoubtedly, the most significant of these is the Eucharist, instituted at the Last

⁴⁵ Ibid., no. 12.

⁴⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, nos. 13–14. See KL, no. 5.

⁴⁷ DD, no. 21.

⁴⁸ Ibid., no. 64. Cf. D. Kwiatkowski, *Liturgiczna pedagogia wiary w liście apostolskim papieża Franciszka „Desiderio desideravi”*, 'Pedagogika Katolicka' 33a (2023) 3, pp. 26–27.

Supper and prefiguring the events of Christ's passion and death. Our participation in Christ's Passover is not a result of our merit, but rather, it is Jesus' profound desire for us to partake in it.

The papal letter continues the Church's teaching on the liturgy as outlined in the constitution *Sacrosanctum concilium*. It highlights three foundational pillars of the Church's liturgy: the presence of Christ, the fulfillment of His priestly mission, and the Paschal Mystery as the central event made present through liturgical signs. Pope Francis emphasizes the aspect of gratuity and the selfless nature of the gift inherent in the liturgy. This emphasis aligns with the purpose and historical context of both documents.

Desiderio desideravi was written amid ongoing discussions about the justice and correctness of the liturgical reform implemented by the Second Vatican Council. Today, we encounter voices and specific actions that challenge this reform. It is also a time marked by the resurgence of Gnosticism and Neo-Pelagianism, which Pope Francis explicitly refers to as 'the poison of spiritual worldliness.' Regarding the first phenomenon, the Pope clearly states that the liturgical books published and approved by Popes Paul VI and John Paul II are expressions of the principle *lex credendi, lex orandi*. In addressing the second issue, Francis presents the liturgy of the Church as a remedy for this spiritual poison. He warns against a Pharisaical interpretation of the liturgy that focuses solely on external aspects. This approach leads to comparisons and judgments about which form of liturgy is superior. The Pope reminds us that the most important goal of every liturgical celebration—regardless of its origin, whether from Trent or post-Vatican II—is to encounter Christ and immerse ourselves in His Paschal Mystery. To experience the liturgy in this profound way, we need thorough formation 'for the liturgy' and 'through the liturgy.' In conclusion, let us heed the words of Pope Francis, 'We have received Pascha; let us allow ourselves to be shielded by the Lord's constant desire to eat it with us, under the eye of Mary, Mother of the Church.'⁴⁹

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⁴⁹ DD, no. 65.

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