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Liturgy and the Mission of the Church in *Maximum Illud*

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Mission and the whole enterprise of making Jesus Christ and his gospel of salvation known, of taking him and his word to the ends of the earth, was the primordial charge and command the Lord gave to his disciples before his Ascension into heaven. During His earthly ministry, especially in the sending of the disciples on mission to Israel, Christ demonstrated that his mission was not exclusive. It was inclusive. Besides, he wanted others to take an active role in it, represent him, and become active protagonists in the effort to make disciples of all nations. The liturgy was one of the institutions established by the Lord for the accomplishment of this mission. The entire liturgy of the Church, the Eucharist, and the other sacraments, the sacramentals, the liturgy of the hours, liturgical year, are all for the advancement of the mission of Christ and his Bride, the Church.

The link between the liturgy and the mission of the Church was never explicitly stated in the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* of Benedict XV.[1] This could be because the function of the liturgy in the mission of the Church had always been taken as a given. *Maximum Illud* became a mission watershed that stated the theological vision of the Church on its mission and charted the way both for the theory and praxis of mission in the Church and the response of the Church to the divine mandate of the Master in the gospels. While it is true that the link was never explicit, it can however be stated that the link was implicit all through the document. This implicit link is seen by considering some of the fundamental concepts proposed by

[1]Benedict XV, *Apostolic Letter Maximum Illud*, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xv_apl_19191130_maximum-illud.html (accessed 16.07.19).

Maximum Illud and the pronouncements of the Church at the Second Vatican Council in the document on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.[2]

The main thrust of *Maximum Illud* was to lead to a resurgence and reawakening in the Church, of the missionary zeal that characterised the long history of the Church down through the ages of its existence and actions within human history. Thus, the missionary mandate, task and the work of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth, were seen within the document as not just a preoccupation of the past and past generations of Christians, but as "a momentous and a holy charge",[3] that is, as the rule for generations of modern believers. Written at the end of the tragic events of the First World War, it was intended to counter a narrative that enthroned colonialism and the subjugation of the human person and nations by others.

Liturgy at the Dawn of Mission and the Missionary Mandate

Liturgy forms part and parcel of the mission of Christ, carried on by the Church in obedience to His command, and thus the sole and indisputable preoccupation of the Church. Central to that mission is the liturgy. We can, therefore, say that Liturgy is intrinsic to the mission of the Church. The reason for the fundamental collocation of liturgy to the mission of the Church is not farfetched: Jesus Christ, the founder of the Christian religion, was the *homo liturgicus* par excellence. In his earthly mission, He demonstrated in his life and actions the intricate connection between rite, worship, and mission. He participated in temple and synagogal worship, feasts and liturgical prayers connected with the worship handed down from the tradition of a nation that knew how to pray[4] and that had been foremost in its understanding and adherence to

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[2] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html (accessed 09.09.19).

[3] Benedict XV, *Maximum Illud*, no. 1.

[4] Cf. Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, Studies in Biblical Theology, 2nd Series, no. 6 (London: Thrift Books, 1967), 66; Ruben B. Leikam, "The Liturgy of the Hours in the First Four Centuries", in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies: Liturgical Time and Space*, ed. Anscar J. Chupuncgco (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 4.

the adoration and worship that are characteristic of a monotheistic religion of a Supreme God. His participation and practice of worship in the Jewish religion notwithstanding, the life, actions, utterances of our Lord demonstrated that He understood and knew that he was going to inaugurate a new mode of worship and relationship with God that would not be based on the offering of things but the offering of himself.

The institution, command, and mandate at the Last Supper[5] and the missionary mandate on the day of his ascension into heaven[6] can, therefore, be seen as two sides of the same coin: announcement and actualisation.[7] Within the second mandate, that is, the mandate on the day of the ascension, Christ linked the salvation of souls to the fundament of a liturgical directive and mandate: to baptise. With this, it is, therefore, admissible to proffer that the link between the liturgy and mission, seen both in the life of Christ and in his final mandates, were made by the Christ himself. From His life, earthly mission, and final mandates, we interpret his will and desire that the reality of mission and liturgy be inseparable and intrinsically inter-connected and inter-dependent. We find in Jesus, the *homo liturgicus*,[8] that is, the liturgical man or man of the liturgy or man of worship and rites, also the *homo missionis*,[9] that is, the man of mission. The entire life of Jesus Christ, from His pre-existence outside time with the Father, to his manifestation in time at the

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[5]"Then he took some bread, and when he had given thanks, broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body which will be given for you; do this as a memorial of me.'" Luke 22,19-20. Scriptural Texts are taken from *The Jerusalem Bible,* Standard Edition (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966).

[6]"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time." Mt.28:18-20.

[7]Cf. Paolo Giglioni, "Missione, evangelizzazione, liturgia", in *Pontificia Universita Urbaniana, Dizionario di Missiologia* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1993), 323.

[8]Jesus made the worship in the Temple, especially the great Feasts or the weekly Sabbath in the Synagogue a feature of His earthly ministry. In several instances, we find Him in the Temple or in the Synagogue. Cf. Lk 2:41-52 (Presentation at the Temple); Jn 2:13-22 (Cleansing of the Temple); Jn 5:1 (possibly feast of Pentecost or Tabernacles); Jn 7:2-16 (feast of the Tabernacles); Jn 8:2 (the woman caught in adultery and brought to the temple for stoning); Jn 8:20 (Jesus taught in the Temple); Jn 8:59.

[9]Mission as Saviour and deliverer of the people from their sins (Mt 1:21); as One who possessed the Spirit of the Lord to bring the good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives, declare the year of the Lord's favour (Lk 4:18); as the only begotten Son sent by the Father to the world out of love (Jn 3:16).

Incarnation, when he broke into our history,[10] to the period of his coming again at the Parousia, is intrinsically and intricately connected to his mission as saviour and Redeemer. The Church, by linking both realities together in an indestructible union, is, therefore, doing nothing but following the model and example Christ gave as the *homo liturgicus* and *homo missionis* par excellence.

Before his ascension to heaven, Christ gave the missionary mandate.[11] From this, we can indubitably aver that mission is the heart and soul of the Church; without mission, the Church will stagnate, stifle and die; mission has to do with the proclamation of the good news of salvation to all men and women, to the ends of the earth and make disciples of all nations. Liturgy and mission were inseparably linked by the Saviour himself at the missionary mandate to the disciples and the entire Church right at the beginning. Linked to the mandate to go out into the whole world and make disciples of all the nations was the command to baptise those made disciples. Liturgy and mission are therefore linked by the fundamental constituents of both mission and the liturgy.

The Church is missionary in nature under the mandate. The mission makes the Church because the work of the mission brings new members, freshness, and wholeness to the Church; the Church is at the service of the mission. Liturgy is intrinsic to the mission of the Church, as its source and summit.[12] The Church lives the liturgy. The Church draws life from the liturgy. The mission of the Church is therefore lifeless without the liturgy, its heart, and soul.

Mission in the Liturgy of the Church

Mission is at the heart of the liturgy of the Church. Liturgy in its fundamental nature is missiological, that is, in its constituent, liturgy is oriented towards mission. Liturgy is missiological in so far

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[10]Cf. Anscar J. Chupungco, "Liturgical Time and Space" in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies: Liturgical Time and Space*, ed. Anscar J. Chupuncgco (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), xvii.
[11]Cf. Mk 16:15-16; Mt 28:19-20.
[12]Cf. Giglioni, "Missione, evangelizzazione, liturgia", 324.

as it is deeply concerned with the formation of the human persons within the cult to reach out beyond themselves in actions of justice, the good of man, responsible citizenship, integration of faith and rites with life outside the exclusive purviews and ambient of the rite-faith milieu; the translation of the word and sacrament celebrated and believed in into the guiding principles and ways of living life outside of the celebration.

Liturgy nourishes the Church and her mission. Mission is continued through the prayers, sacrifices, sacraments, sacramentals, and blessings that are the constituents of the liturgy. The work of mission and soul-winning that are achieved *ad extra* in the moments of encounter of the people with the good news, is continued when the same word of salvation is encountered within and through the liturgy. The *Ite missa est*, that is, the dismissal of the assembly,[13] is not intended therefore to be the end of the effect of the liturgical act in the lives of those who participate in it. The *Ite missa est* is intended to be the beginning of concrete engagement with reality and the world outside of the celebration, such that the fruits of the Eucharist are taken to the world outside.

Liturgy gives mission a distinctive Catholic character, focus, outlook, end, and goal. Liturgy reveals what the Church is: in its ecclesiological character, the liturgy reveals the Church: as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, though hierarchically ordered and with individual members making present their charisms and gifts. The liturgy manifests the faith of the Church: it professes, demonstrates, celebrates, and makes present the faith of the Church. In this regard, presence, and participation in the liturgy become the demonstrable profession of what the Church believes and confesses. The liturgy continues and solidifies the basic content of the faith encounter acquired during the preaching of the gospel and the decision to become a disciple and a partaker in the hope of salvation.

The Liturgy, by its nature, tells us what the Church is and therefore gives a distinctive identity to the actions of the Church. That

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[13]Marcel Metzger, "A Eucharistic Lexicon", in *Handbook For Liturgical Studies* 3, ed. A. J. Chupungco, A Pueblo Book (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press,1997), 3.

distinctive identity or imprint that the liturgy gives to the Church distinguishes her and her mission and becomes a mark of witness to her catholicity and universality. In the liturgy, we encounter the *Christus totus*, the entire Christ. This is especially so at the celebration of the sacraments of salvation, especially the Eucharist, the celebration of the sacramentals, the celebration of the mysteries of salvation in the annual liturgical calendar, the liturgy of the hours or the earthly ecclesial participation in the singing of the praises of God in the halls of heaven.[14]

The word of God is a fundamental constituent of the liturgy. In the word of God, we meet the total Christ; within the word, the work of salvation and redemption is recalled and the obedience of faith is inculcated. The word, therefore, contains the memorial of the saving works of Christ. This memorial, especially as it culminated in the Paschal Mystery, constitutes the heart and soul of the liturgy. The actions of the liturgy, therefore, have the Paschal Mystery as their basis, point of departure and arrival, alimentation, sustenance, and growth. Within and through the liturgy and the actions of the liturgy, the work of making the Church and building it up is achieved. Within and through the same actions of the liturgy, the work of preaching the gospel and making disciples for Christ is accomplished.

A re-reading on Liturgy and Mission in *Maximum Illud*

As stated earlier, *Maximum Illud* does not directly talk about the role of the liturgy in the mission of the Church. However, the opening statements of *Maximum illud*[15] and *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 5 bear striking similarities that demonstrate the

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[14] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 83.

[15] "Before He returned to His Father, Our Lord Jesus Christ addressed to His disciples the words: 'Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to all creation' (*Mk* 16:15). With these words He committed to them a duty, a momentous and a holy charge, that was not to lapse with the death of the Apostles but would bind their successors, one after another, until the end of the world – as long, that is, as there remained on this earth men whom the truth might set free. Entrusted with this mandate, 'they went forth and preached everywhere' (*Mk* 16:20) the word of God, so that 'through all the earth their voice resounds, and to the ends of the world, their message' (*Ps* 18:5). From that time on, as the centuries have passed, the Church has never forgotten that command God gave her, and never yet has she ceased to dispatch to every corner of the world her couriers of the doctrine He entrusted to her, and her ministers of the eternal salvation that was delivered through Christ to the human race." Benedict XV, *Apostolic Letter Maximum Illud,* no. 1.

continuity of tradition. The opening words describe the missionary mandate and its fundamental content: as a command given to the apostle and their successors to be carried out until the world ceases to exist; the content of that mission as setting free of men and women by the word of truth and as the extension of the faith. They describe the Apostolic response to this mandate and command as that of obedience to the command and the readiness to carry out the instruction given by the Master. That mission was not understood by the Apostles as coterminous or limited to themselves. They did not understand the command as one to have been carried out by themselves alone, in which case there would have been a cessation of the work of mission after the time of the Apostles. In a significant way, the Apostles in an unbroken Tradition passed on the mission to their disciples and followers, and from them, the mission work has continued from their time to the present and the end of the world.

Sacrosanctum Concilium 5 & 6 and *Maximum Illud*

Sacrosanctum Concilium 5[16] gives us the origin, fount, and the source of mission as God the Father. The mission is exemplified and centred on principal desires and will of God the Father for the salvation of mankind and that all come to the knowledge of the truth. This is the content of the desire of the heart of God which forms the heart and livewire of the mission God entrusted to persons at different times in the history of His encounter with humanity. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 5 delineated two important moments that concretized the fulfilment of this desire of Yahweh: the mission of the prophets and holy persons and at the fullness of time, the mission of the Son or the works of God in the Old Testament and the works of God the Father in the mission of the Son

[16]"God who 'wills that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim. 2:4), 'who in many and various ways spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets' (Heb. 1:1), when the fullness of time had come sent His Son, the Word made flesh, anointed by the Holy Spirit, to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the contrite of heart, to be a 'bodily and spiritual medicine', the Mediator between God and man. For His humanity, united with the person of the Word, was the instrument of our salvation. Therefore, in Christ 'the perfect achievement of our reconciliation came forth, and the fullness of divine worship was given to us'. The wonderful works of God among the people of the Old Testament were but a prelude to the work of Christ the Lord in redeeming mankind and giving perfect glory to God. He achieved His task principally by the paschal mystery of His blessed passion, resurrection from the dead, and the glorious ascension, whereby 'dying, he destroyed our death and, rising, he restored our life'. For it was from the side of Christ as He slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth 'the wondrous sacrament of the whole Church'". *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 5.

in the New Testament. The mission of the prophets and the holy persons of old was to bring about the fulfilment of this holy will of God. In this regard, these Old Testament personages, who were messengers of the divine will, became the precursors of the Son of God. The sending of the Son by the Father and his coming into our space and entrance into our history brought about the high point and the maximum realisation of these twin desires of God for saving men and bringing them to the knowledge of the truth.

The content of the mission of the Son on earth consisted of preaching the gospel to the poor, healing the contrite of heart, being "bodily and spiritual medicine" and "Mediator between God and man". To achieve this, the Son took on our nature, assumed our humanity, and united with "the person of the Word" became the "instrument of our salvation." Thus, the salvation willed by God from the beginning found concrete expression in the Son, who became the instrument of the salvation willed by the Father. In the person of the Son, the "perfect achievement of our reconciliation came forth, and the fullness of divine worship was given to us." The Son, therefore, achieved two things in His Person: reconciliation with the Father; the fullness of divine worship.

God encountered humanity in the Old Testament. The works and encounters of God with humanity in the Old Testament are just a prelude, a preannouncement, and a prefiguring of the work and mission of Christ in the New Testament. The mission of Christ when He came is that of redeeming mankind and giving perfect glory to God the Father. Christ achieved the redemption of mankind and gave perfect glory to God through the Paschal Mystery. The wondrous sacrament of the whole Church, that is, the Church as a sign and reality in the world set up for its salvation and the entire gamut of the sacramental economy as represented by the septenaria, came forth as Christ slept the sleep of death on the cross. Thus, the sacramental economy is based on the Passion and death of Christ.

The Core, Theology and Tradition of Mission of the Son

The Father sent the Son. The mission of the Son is therefore not fortuitous or accidental. It was part of the divine will of the Father. The mission of the Son did not end with the death of the Son. The

Son willed that the mission should continue. This was why the Son sent the Apostles, after having filled them with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is therefore part and parcel of the mission given by the Son. The Holy Spirit, present at the Incarnation of the Word and thus part of the mission of the Son, is also a principal agent of the mission entrusted by the Son to the Church.

The Apostles were given the responsibility of continuing the work of salvation brought by the Son. The content of the mission given by the Son to the Apostles and the kernel of their kerygma is the preaching of the gospel to every creature, proclamation of Jesus as the Son of God, the announcement that He died and rose again to life. Other kerygmatic elements include the proclamation that by His death and resurrection, Christ freed us from the power of Satan and death. By his death and resurrection, Christ brought us into the kingdom of his Father. It was the purpose of the Lord that the work of salvation should not be limited only to preaching the gospel and the various proclamations linked to it. It was his will that the accomplishment of the mission of salvation should be accompanied with the sacrifice and the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and the other sacraments, "around which the entire liturgical life revolves." Baptism, the Eucharist, the other sacraments, and indeed the entire liturgy of the Church, make one a participant and an active protagonist in the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Through them, the work of mission is continued. For instance, through baptism, the person brought to Christ through preaching is plunged into the Paschal Mystery of Christ: dies, is buried and rises with Christ; receives the spirit of adoption, and becomes a true adorer. Through the Eucharist, the person eats the supper of the Lord and proclaims His death.[17]

From the beginnings of the Church, the mission has been intricately linked with the dispensation of the sacraments and the celebration of the liturgy. For instance, we know that in the early Church, the disciples gathered for the breaking of bread on the first day of the week.[18] The breaking of the bread thus became a distinguishing mark of their community and the identification of those who

[17]Cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 6.

[18]Acts 2:42,46.

belonged to their company. On the first day of the manifestation of the Church before Israel and the world, that is, on the day of Pentecost, the preaching of the word by Peter was accompanied by the dispensation of the sacrament of baptism. That was not all. All those who believed the word and received baptism "continued steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles and in the communion of the breaking of bread and in prayers . . . praising God and being in favor with all the people" (Acts 2:41-47). From that time onwards the Church has never failed to come together to celebrate the paschal mystery: reading those things "which were in all the scriptures concerning him" (Luke 24:27), celebrating the eucharist in which "the victory and triumph of his death are again made present", and at the same time giving thanks "to God for his unspeakable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15) in Christ Jesus, "in praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:12), through the power of the Holy Spirit."[19]

The Mission of the Church Today: The Contributions of *Maximum Illud*

There is an urgent need today for the formation of persons for the mission of the Church in all levels of ecclesial life. Gone are the days when it was believed that the work of mission was the exclusive preserve of some persons or entities who had the work of mission as their special charisms or areas of apostolate. The need for the explosion of energy towards the realization of the great harvest desired by the Lord Jesus demands a concerted, centripetal and centrifugal concentration of actions and synergies for the achievement of the missionary command of the Lord Jesus. In this regard, we need to pay renewed attention to the insights of *Maximum Illud* on the need for a synergy of collaborative efforts. We must never see the mission as private property. There are particular roles expected of the different strata of persons within the Church. There is equally the need for primordial care for the achievement of the work of mission. The leaders of the Church should cultivate the fundamental solicitude towards the mission. The insights of *Maximum Illud*, issued over a hundred years ago, are therefore prophetic for the mission of the Church and the definition of its character, *modus essendi*, *modus vivendi,* and *modus operandi*.

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[19] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 6.

Given its missionary nature, the Church in every time and place must devise new missionary impetus and strategies to meet the needs of the time. It is, however, important for the mission of the Church and the agents of that mission to develop new interpretive keys for the gospel's timeless message. Such hermeneutic disposition helps the Church's message to fit the needs, temperaments, mentalities, sensibilities, conditions, age, circumstances of the persons, peoples, and cultures. The mission of the Church today, therefore, calls for the crafting of new methodologies and approaches. There are threats to the mission of the Church in our modern world. Threats are coming from warped ideologies that enthrone the primacy of the human person, that is, that the human person is answerable only to himself and to no other-worldly divine referent. Some ideologies objectivise the relativism of values, in which there are no objective values. Some ideologies promote extremism and ascendancy of one religion over another. These ideologies sentence those who do not subscribe to their visions to forced submission or in the event of a refusal to submit, to loss of life. There are also ideological currents that seek to silence the voice of the Church in the societal sphere, especially in matters of conscience, morality, and the articulation of what constitutes the reason for man's existence in the world. The Church, in its mission in the world today, has the responsibility of responding to these old threats in new clothing and forms and to provide authentic and alternative narratives to the ones that are vociferously peddled as the correct paths to be followed.

The need for preparation for the mission of the Church, therefore, is imperative today as when *Maximum Illud* was published. This preparation – human, material, institutional, spiritual – must be inclusive, formational, and not merely informational, rooted, and implanted in the being of persons. The preparation must be seen as urgent and compelling because of the end of the Christian mission. It must involve the fundamental understanding and interpretation of the mission of the Christ, applied first and foremost to the self, the self who is called to discipleship and followership. It is only after such personal interiorisation and internalisation of the basic truths

and convictions on which the mission of the Lord are based, that the person so prepared can become authentic in the witnessing that the mission truly demands. There is, therefore, need for formation into authentic mission witnessing, a witnessing that is centred on the newness of the Person of Christ for all times and all ages and generations; on the role of Jesus in history; on the centrality of His Paschal Mystery, and on the meaning of that mystery for the world today.

Part of that preparation would be the establishment of institutes for the formation of mission personnel where such institutes are non-existent, the rejigging of existing mission institutes to meet the demands of the times and of the places for which they were founded. These institutes would also be at the forefront of crafting policies and methodologies for the mission, the application of such policies using pilot schemes in selected communities. Other functions will include the formulation of the content of an intellectual, cultural, linguistic, social, cultural, cultic, and cultural programme for mission; the real-time formation of mission personnel on the nitty-gritty of mission work.

Mission work in modern times will also require the re-formation of the mission personnel and agents at different levels on their roles and the responsibilities required of them in the overall missionary enterprise of the Church. This is very important when considered against the backdrop of the important roles that *Maximum Illud* assigned to the mission promoters and agents in the overall mission work of the Church. The mission of the Church in particular Churches will also have to look into the roles that the diocesan presbyterium can exercise in the overall *mission ad extra*. It is instructive to note that the paradigm we have today is a scenario in which the diocesan priests are much involved in *missio ad intra*, that is, mission to the persons already preached to by the early missionaries from various congregations and religious institutes. The model today is the type in which the religious institutes chart the path and clear the way for the implantation of the word and the good news in a particular area. Thereafter, they leave the mission to the indigenous clergy. It is, however, instructive that the prophetic

insights of *Maximum Illud* envisage however a situation in which the diocesan presbyterium can and should become pathfinders themselves, especially after the presbyterium of a diocese has arrived at a certain maturity. That maturity, according to *Maximum Illud*, does not imply that a diocese has achieved a surplus of priests and can, therefore "afford" to send some on mission to uncharted waters. In the prophetic insight of *Maximum Illud*, the principle of collaboration and cooperation must necessitate the sharing of personnel even in ecclesial situations where they are not in surplus and even insufficient. This is founded on the principle of charity and solidarity that should be the watchword of every missionary activity and should be the guiding character of mission work in every age and time.

Conclusion

The role of the liturgy in the mission of the Church is fundamental and coterminous with the very foundation of the Church and with its call to mission to continue the work of salvation accomplished by the Lord. In the efforts aimed at the realisation of the mission of Christ and the Church, the liturgy, the *culmen et fons* of ecclesial life and the work of the apostolate, is an indispensable instrument for the furtherance of the command of Christ to make disciples of all nations.