

Appealing to the senses: The liturgy reaches our hearts through our senses and thus stirs up the faith that is within us.

Sight. Our liturgy is not grey: it is colourful and highly visible, filled with movement, processions and gestures. Lights and candles focus our attention, and the colours of vestments, books and decorations strike us. Rising incense is a symbol of our prayer ascending to God. Throughout the church, truly beautiful art – statues, paintings and stained glass – challenges us to seek what is beyond. Light and darkness can be skilfully used to promote prayerful moods.

Hearing. The liturgy appeals to our ears: faith comes by hearing. We listen to the readings and prayers, to the music and singing. Many voices speak to us.

Taste. In the flavour of the bread of life and the taste of the wine from the cup of salvation, we experience, we “taste and see”, the goodness of the Lord.

Smell. Fragrant incense is a sign of our praise and prayer, and of purification from sin. The pleasant aroma of beeswax and the God-given perfume of living flowers add to the scents that hint at the limitless beauty of our creator.

Touch. In the liturgy, we feel the ashes placed on our foreheads, we hold the crispy palms, feel the firm candle in our hand, experience the flow of water over us in baptism, and the soothing oil in several sacraments. We experience the sign of peace: we reach out and touch our neighbour’s hand. We receive the Eucharistic bread in our hands, and place it in our mouth. We drink from the Eucharistic cup, and feel the sacred refreshment as we drink it.

Silence: We also participate in the liturgy by our reverent silence at times. We pause in silent recollection during the penitential rite. When the priest says, “Let us pray,” we all pause in silence. After each reading and the homily, it is important to have a moment of silent reflection, when we may listen to the Spirit speaking deep within us. We pause for quiet reflection after the communion song. Silence at these points of the liturgy helps us to celebrate better.

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In all these ways, the Lord is helping us to express our love and praise for him, and to give him worship without using words.

*Lord Jesus,
Son of God and our brother,
we praise you for saving us
by your obedience to the Father.
He raised you up and declared
that you are Lord and Saviour to all.*

*Help us to use our bodies for God's praise:
to eat and drink, to work and love,
to rejoice and suffer, to praise and pray.*

*Lord Jesus,
we offer our thanks to the Father
through you as our brother
in the love of the Holy Spirit,
now and for ever. Amen!*

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WORSHIP WITHOUT WORDS

In him we live and move
and have our being

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Worship Without Words

Christians believe in the resurrection of the body and in everlasting life. We are made to praise God with our whole being, heart and mind, soul and body. The Lord Jesus – one like us in all things but sin – saved us because he loved us as human persons.

By baptism, Jesus makes us the holy people of God and invites us to take part in his own worship and prayer. He offers our praise to the Father and brings our prayers for others as part of his own prayer.

Full participation: Since the Second Vatican Council, Catholics take for granted their call to an increasingly active part in liturgy by word, action and song.

But, there are many other ways to worship God – ways we may have forgotten. To share more fully in the liturgical action, we use our bodies in posture, gesture, movement and rest. The world around us, too, the time and place in which we find ourselves, and all God's creatures help us to offer greater praise to God.

Expressing what we mean: By our bodily actions – standing, sitting, kneeling, bowing, making the sign of the cross, greeting other persons with the peace of Christ, eating the bread of life and drinking from the cup of salvation – we express and reinforce our faith, and we encourage others in their prayer of faith.

Our bodies, and all natural things like bread, wine, water, oil and candles, have a meaning inherent in them, which directs our attention beyond body or object. When we use them in worship, we direct them to God, and they help us to express our relationship with him.

Postures: We praise God and express our faith by the way we stand, sit, kneel, or bow during the liturgy.

Standing is a basic attitude of praise, prayer and worship, one of attentiveness, and of readiness to hear and obey. We stand at various times during the Mass. We thank God that he has made us “worthy to stand in his presence and serve” him.

Sitting. We sit to listen to God's word, to reflect on his love and our need of his mercy, and for moments of quiet worship, prayer and praise.

Kneeling. In the early centuries of the Church's life, kneeling was reserved for weekday prayer (the attitude for Sundays was always standing). Kneeling is a sign of our adoration, sorrow, humility, or pleading. It is the attitude for penance.

Bowing. Bows express reverence and adoration, as during the blessing at the end of the celebration.

Gestures: The gestures that we make during Mass also express and deepen our faith and reverence:

Sign of the cross. We make the large sign of the cross at the beginning of Mass and during the final blessing. At the gospel, we make a small cross on our forehead, lips and heart.

Sign of peace. Before Communion, we share a sign of peace with those who are standing near us. By our warm handshake or another friendly gesture, we express our unity in Christ. Through our mutual forgiveness and love, Jesus brings his peace into the world.

Signs that speak: The Church invites us to use signs and symbols that speak for themselves. No longer satisfied with doing only the minimum, we use generous signs.

Real bread. We are invited to use real wheat bread, though made without yeast: it is to look and taste like real food, bread that can be broken and shared. Communion is to be given with bread consecrated in each Mass. We are invited to receive it in our hands and to eat it; to feel its texture and taste its sweetness.

Communion from the chalice. Jesus commanded us to drink his blood of the new covenant. Drinking from the cup is a fuller symbol of Christ's total gift to us. Wine is the symbol of gladness and shared joy.

Book of the word. A dignified book – large, clearly printed, well bound – is carried in procession by the deacon or reader. The readers proclaim God's word from the Lectionary and the priest preaches the homily from its readings.

Other symbols. The vestments of the ministers indicate their role in the celebration. The altar is fashioned as a real table, for the Mass is both sacrifice and meal.

Good symbols are clear signs to us – a good symbol does not have to be explained to achieve its purpose.

House of the Church: The church building is a symbol of God's people on earth. Strangers and visitors are made to feel welcome when they enter. The church is clean and beautiful. The sanctuary remains uncluttered, the altar simply decorated, the lighting good. Our church is a house of prayer for all.