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The word “liturgy” finds its origin in the Greek “leitourgia”/root word “leit”—which is a public work done on behalf of people, done on behalf of someone else.

Many times liturgy is described as the “work of the people”. This is only partly true and not its primary reference. The liturgy is first and foremost the action of God, his initiative, into which we are drawn and invited to participate. Christ, triumphantly raised in the Spirit, stands before the throne of God the Father where he executes the heavenly liturgy of adoration and praise and intercedes for the salvation of all humanity. In the heavenly “liturgy” Christ is the great “leitourgos”, the one who acts on “behalf” of humanity.

In the earthly liturgy of the Church it is the total Christ, head and members, which acts. It is God’s service of us and vice versa, and is ultimately a Trinitarian act. God acts and we respond. Christ the head with his body the Church in the Spirit offers praise and glory to God the Father on behalf of all humanity. In this sense, then, the liturgy is the “work of the people”, but only in relation to Christ, the divine and heavenly “leitourgos”.

Liturgy, then, is necessarily an ordered activity that comes to us from our heritage and tradition. As a divine action, primarily, it draws us more and more fully into the mystery of Christ and forms us into an icon of Christ. Christian liturgy is unique in that it is rooted in history, and not in some mythical space. However, the liturgy does not seek a return to the past but moves us to the “Eschatos”—who is Christ, the final person, in whom we will be all in all. In the liturgy, Christ’s own Paschal Mystery, a real event of history, is made uniquely present in the “now” because he destroyed death and all that he accomplished and is, is now part of the divine eternity and so transcends all time. What was begun with the Apostles is handed on through the sacrifice and sacraments around which the whole liturgical life of the Church revolves. By the power of the Holy Spirit the Apostles entrusted their mission to others. Apostolic Succession then is itself sacramental and structures the whole life of the Church. To accomplish so great a salvific work, Christ is always present to his Church especially in her liturgical celebrations. **For a wonderful reflection on the liturgy cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church nos. 1066-1162.**