

Weekly Message from Fr William for the Third Sunday of Lent 2023

Dear People of St Mary's, 'We are in need of formation.' Not my words, the words of Pope Francis. What does it mean, 'formation'? It's the biblical image of clay in the potter's hands: Isaiah 64:7 'And yet, Lord, you are our Father; we the clay, you the potter. We are all the work of your hands.'

Jeremiah 18:6 'Yes, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so you are in mine.'

'Formation' means our growth as disciples of Christ, as Christians, and, for many of us in St Mary's, as Catholics.

We use the word 'formation' to mean preparing for Baptism, preparing for Confirmation, preparing for Holy Communion. But formation isn't just preparing for the sacraments. It's a lifelong journey. We are being formed as disciples throughout our lives and until our last breath. 'Formation' is an ongoing project in each one of us. And now Pope Francis is calling us, the whole church, to an important component of this formation – liturgical formation. 'We are in need' he says 'of a serious and dynamic liturgical formation.' (*Desiderio Desideravi* 31). So this is what we have embarked on this Lent.

Last Sunday I went through some basics about the Liturgy. Liturgy is the celebration of the sacraments – eg Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist. These are not three separate 'liturgies', but three aspects of the one and only Liturgy. They form an 'organic whole' in which each particular sacrament has its own vital place. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1211).

Central to the Liturgy therefore are these symbolic actions: emersion in, or pouring of, water (Baptism); anointing with chrism (Confirmation); and holy communion (Eucharist). These actions are symbolic. They 'speak' to us about what's happening invisibly. But the celebration of the Liturgy also includes other elements: other symbolic actions by the priest, other symbolic actions by the congregation, dialogue between priest and congregation, proclamation of the Word ('the readings'), singing psalms, praying prayers, offering gifts.

Part of our liturgical formation is to be aware of each of these elements, and conscious of what we are doing in each of them. For example in the Liturgy of the Mass we're not just praying. Praying is just one element in the Liturgy. Did you know for example that in the Liturgy of the Word you are caught up in a dialogue between God and his people?

Celebration of the Liturgy is made up of symbols & symbolic actions, and Francis is saying that we need to recover our capacity to engage with symbol and symbolic action if we are to participate fully in the celebration of the Liturgy, if we are to respond to what the Spirit is saying to the Church through the Second Vatican Council:

Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism. (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 14)



Third Sunday of Lent 12th March 2023