

We continue again with the liturgical participation of God's people.

Pius XII's letter represented a great leap forward in the liturgical movement. Many of the ideas of the movement, especially active participation, were becoming church policy. But while the letter encouraged people in the pews to follow along at Mass, it did not propose any concrete changes to allow people to understand the Mass and participate in it more fully. However, Pius X and Pius XII did pave the way for something greater to occur in the area of active participation: the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, which called for the full, conscious, and active participation of all the people at Mass.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, or CSL, is the first of all the Council documents and states that the "... full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations [is] called for by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as a 'chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people' is their right and duty by reason of their baptism."

What does the CSL mean when it says that participation is called for "by the very nature of liturgy"? It means the liturgy by its nature is a communal action. Communal liturgical celebrations are always preferred to "private" ones. Liturgy is at its best when the people are gathered together with their bishop, and all those present are fully participating in the celebration.

In order to participate, the liturgy needs to be understood, and so the CSL allowed for the liturgy to be celebrated in the vernacular, or local languages of the people. Pope Paul VI gave a speech in Saint Peter Square in March 1965 in which he remarked that the use of local languages had been judged by the church "to be necessary to make its prayer understandable and grasped by all. The good of the faithful calls for this kind of action, making possible their active share in the church's worship." The pope went on to say that the use of common languages "means that you, the faithful ... may be able to unite yourselves more closely to the church's prayer, pass over from being simple spectators to becoming active participants."