

Article

The Emmaus Account as a Paradigm for Liturgical Formation of Families: Principles and Pastoral Applications with Reference to Pope Francis' *Desiderio Desideravi*

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Abstract: This article addresses the need for liturgical formation that Pope Francis recently highlighted for the whole Catholic Church in his apostolic letter *Desiderio Desideravi*. The current American Eucharistic Revival encourages engagement in this. Based on a detailed spiritual–liturgical reading of the Emmaus account (Lk 24:13–35), the article develops guiding principles for liturgical catechesis and considers their practical applications with a particular focus on families. The first principle underscores the connection between liturgy and life, which makes catechesis relevant for daily life, e.g., by including testimonies of parents. A second principle outlines the pivotal importance of symbols and suggests methods to enhance their understanding. Fostering active participation in the liturgy, the third principle, is a practical consequence because the celebration itself forms the participants. Moreover, liturgical catechesis connects explanation and experience, as the mystagogical catecheses of the Church fathers demonstrated. Along with Pope Francis, this article also highlights Sunday as a gift and discusses ways of integrating families in the Sunday Eucharist. Finally, the last principles shed light on the task of the priest as the “catechist of catechists”. This article both explains the biblical basis of these principles and outlines practical ways to implement liturgical catechesis for families in parishes.

Keywords: liturgical formation; catechesis; *Desiderio Desideravi*; Guardini; Emmaus; symbols; Eucharist; liturgical studies; Pope Francis; faith formation



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1. Introduction: A Timely Task¹

Liturgical formation is a very timely task. Pope Francis dedicated the recent Apostolic letter *Desiderio Desideravi* to this topic (Francis 2022).² Its root can be traced back to before the pandemic, which had postponed its publication. The plenary assembly of the Congregation (now Dicastery) for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments discussed the topic of “liturgical formation” in February 2019. Similar complaints about the lack of liturgical formation came from many parts of the universal Church. Pope Francis then gave an address that already contained many of the thoughts in *Desiderio Desideravi*, which is a response to this identified need in order “to deepen and revive our liturgical formation” (Francis 2019a). In his apostolic letter, he highlights the need for serious liturgical formation, both in and beyond the academic environment “so that each one of the faithful might grow in a knowledge of the theological sense of the Liturgy [...] helping each and all to acquire the capacity to comprehend the eucharological texts, the ritual dynamics, and their anthropological significance” (Francis 2022, no. 35).

The pope distinguishes, as one usually does,³ two directions of liturgical formation: “formation for the Liturgy and formation by the Liturgy” (Francis 2022, no. 34). The first is more cognitive and serves as preparation for the liturgy. The document recalls the basic theological understanding of the liturgy/Eucharist. It is remarkable how much he explains the liturgy from the lens of the Eucharist; even if he speaks of the liturgy in general, his examples are often taken from the Mass. Starting from Christ’s desire in the Upper Room,

he describes the liturgy as the “today” of salvation history and as a place of encounter with Christ. Since the Church is the sacrament of the body of Christ, liturgy builds up the community and serves as an antidote to “spiritual worldliness” (meaning transferring the standards of the world to the Church) and to subjectivism (Francis 2022, no. 17–20). He also stresses the meaning of symbols. The second direction, formation by the liturgy, is, as he says, the more important one: participation in the liturgical celebration forms us (Francis 2022, no. 34 and 40).⁴ This was also the experience of the disciples of Emmaus.

Also the *Directory of Catechesis*, issued in 2020 by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, outlines the liturgical formation among the five tasks of catechesis and calls the third one “to initiate into the celebration of the mystery”⁵ (Pontifical Council 2020, no. 81f). The Eucharistic Revival that the American bishops started in 2022, and which is now in the year of the parish revival, definitely backs and encourages engagement in liturgical formation (<https://www.eucharisticrevival.org>, accessed on 30 November 2023).

This article takes up impulses from the universal Church—Pope Francis wants to “offer some prompts or cues for reflections” (Francis 2022, no. 4)—and is stimulated by efforts in liturgical formation in the US, from the Eucharistic Revival to, e.g., the recent initiative “Welcoming Children in Worship” (<https://welcomingchildren.catholic.edu>, accessed on 10 January 2024).

This study will first present the Emmaus account (Lk 24:13–35) as a paradigm for the liturgical catechesis⁶ on the Mass⁷ by proposing a spiritual or liturgical reading of the famous resurrection narrative (Section 2). From there, in a second step, it will propose important principles of liturgical catechesis and enrich them with practical pastoral suggestions (Section 3). This article makes references to Desiderio Desideravi throughout the considerations, explicitly in the second part.

2. The Emmaus Account as Paradigm for Liturgical Formation

As this article goes back to a presentation at a workshop for pastors, the topic is introduced with a pastoral story. When I visited a family in preparation for a child’s baptism, I remember a very dissimilar pair of parents. The mother, not baptized herself, was extremely talkative, whereas the father was quite taciturn and only said “clear”. After some small talk, mainly dominated by the mother, I presented the rites and the meaning of the baptismal liturgy. The mother listened carefully. The husband, being Catholic, regularly gave a “clear” in response. For him, everything was always “clear”. After the baptism, however, it turned out that nothing was clear because I never saw them again. Two years later, I received a phone call: “The baptism was so nice. Could you also baptize our second child?” I gladly agreed. On my way to the family’s house, I was wondering how long it would take before the first “clear” came up. I arrived at the same time as the godfather and said to the father with the child on his arm, “Nice that you invited the godfather, too”. His reply: “Clear!” Since I had only been waiting for that cue, I could not help laughing. Thankfully, the child did something funny so I could blame it on the child.

What does this story have to do with Emmaus? The disciples of Emmaus were also “Clear!”-types. They knew everything: they knew who Jesus was. They knew that the tomb was empty, that the women were there, that the Angel said He had risen. They knew everything. Everything was “clear” in their mind. But not yet in their heart. They needed the encounter with Christ so that their heart got burning. Hopefully, the reader will not simply say “clear, clear, clear” because many things in the article might be well-known. The goal is that our hearts get burning for liturgical catechesis and that we are able to ignite the hearts of the faithful.

The Emmaus account is a narrative of the first Sunday Eucharist. This has its basis in the text itself, because “that very day” (Lk 24:13) means the “first day of the week” (Lk 24:1), which is Sunday. One of them was named Cleopas (Lk 24:18); we do not know the name of the other. Luke must have deliberately omitted it so that we might insert our own name into this blank space—a rhetorical device quite common at the time. In Emmaus Nicopolis,

one of the three possible Emmaus locations in Israel, there is a life-size icon of Jesus and the two disciples. The face of the second disciple is cut out so that one can go behind the icon and put one's own face in the hole. That is exactly why Luke did not mention the second name, so that we may put our name into that account. Emmaus is a continuous story. It happens every time we celebrate the Eucharist. In addition, the Emmaus account provides the biblical basis for liturgical catechesis and indicates its principles.

2.1. "Two of Them Were Going to a Village Called Emmaus"—Liturgy of the Word

"They were conversing about all the things that had occurred" (Lk 24:14). They were talking about what they had experienced the days before. This means the Mass begins at home: What do I bring to Mass? What has been going on in my life this past week at home, at work? What keeps me busy? What burdens me? What needs his healing mercy? What do I want to be strengthened for, looking ahead to the next day or week? We see here the first principle, which is the connection between liturgy and life. We bring our life into the Eucharist. And the Eucharist gives us the strength for our life. It is like a circle: our lives become integrated into the liturgy, and the liturgy is the source and summit from which the energy flows for our daily activities.

In Kornelimünster Abbey near Aachen, Germany, there is an interesting Emmaus painting, created by Janet Brooks-Gerloff in 1992 (see picture and description: [Altenähr 1993](#)). It deliberately shows the scene on the road from behind. The two disciples are dressed in black, and their heads are lowered. But they turn to the stranger in the center of the picture, who is shown only dimly, weightless, and transparent. They cannot quite place him yet, but he goes along and leans toward them in his turn. One of them puts his hand on him and they begin to talk. While they are walking in conversation, their dark robe lightens at the folds.

Seeing these three people only from the back, we are invited to go behind them, to listen to their conversation, and to join in. The painting hangs in the cloister where the monks gather before the liturgy so that they—and every viewer—are reminded: in the Liturgy of the Word, we are invited to listen to the "Word of the Lord" and to enter into this conversation.

Sacrosanctum Concilium 33 puts this as a principle: "For in the liturgy God speaks to His people and Christ is still proclaiming His gospel. And the people reply to God both by song and prayer". There is a dynamic of a dialogue going on, a dynamic of listening, of reflecting, and then of responding. This proclamation, which we experience in the liturgy, is also outlined by the disciples of Emmaus. Jesus explains the scripture to them and presents content, which is the law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms (Lk 24:44). "He interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures" (Lk 24:27). Hence, there is a content level, passages talking about Jesus. At the same time, there is a personal level: Jesus himself is speaking to them, so that He as a person is addressing the disciples. This conviction that Christ is speaking in the liturgy appears throughout history. St. Augustine (354–430) explains this beautifully: "The mouth of Christ is the Gospel. He is enthroned in heaven, but He does not cease to speak on earth" (*Sermo* 85.1; [Augustine 1865](#), p. 520).⁸ St. John Chrysostom explicitly says of the readings in the Liturgy: "For when the reader stands up and says, 'Thus says the Lord', when the deacon stands up and orders everyone to be silent, this is not done in order to honor the one who reads, but to honor him who speaks to everyone through the reader's mouth" (*Hom. in 2 Thess.* 3.4; [Chrysostom 1862](#), p. 484).⁹ And Sacrosanctum Concilium 7 states: "He [Christ] is present in His Word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church". The Gospel, or in general the Word of God, is of course first an echo of the historical revelation, but it is proclaimed today so that it is Christ speaking it to us. In the liturgical proclamation, scripture becomes again a living voice of Christ. The actual event had been written down, and this written account becomes a vivid voice of Christ and indeed a word of God in the proclamation. Pope Benedict XVI named this the "sacramentality of the Word" ([Benedict XVI 2010](#), no. 56; [Benini 2024](#), pp. 224–45).

This can be applied to liturgical catechesis. As Christ has conveyed knowledge, the content of the explained scripture, liturgical catechesis has to impart knowledge. However, on the road to Emmaus, Jesus combined the instruction with an experience for the disciples. While walking on the way and listening to Jesus, the disciples both began to understand what Jesus was telling them, and at the same time, realized experientially that their hearts were warmed. Therefore, in liturgical catechesis, the relevance of the conveyed knowledge has to be explained in a practical way and to be somehow experienced.

The reflection paper of a student might serve as a practical example of this combination. Regarding the liturgical proclamation, she wrote “Every time I hear the Gospel at Mass, I close my eyes and imagine Jesus standing before me and reciting the words. This is a powerful experience that I look forward to every time I attend Mass. That doesn’t mean that my enthusiasm for the Eucharist diminishes in any way, it just enriches my experience of the Mass even more”. Similarly, Pope Francis highlights the personal encounter with Christ through His Word when, in the spirit of the Ignatian spiritual exercises, he emphasizes the identification with the biblical characters: “I am Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman at the well, the man possessed by demons at Capernaum, the paralytic in the house of Peter, the sinful woman pardoned, the woman afflicted by hemorrhages, the daughter of Jairus, the blind man of Jericho, Zacchaeus, Lazarus, the thief and Peter both pardoned. The Lord Jesus who dies no more, who lives forever with the signs of his Passion continues to pardon us, to heal us, to save us with the power of the sacraments” (Francis 2022, no. 11).

2.2. “Stay with Us”—The Attitude for the Liturgy

Let us return to the disciples of Emmaus. When they approached the village, Jesus “gave the impression that he was going farther”. (Lk 24:28). Jesus does not impose himself; He respects their freedom. But the disciples of Emmaus realize that this man has something important to say to them, even if they do not know Him. They invite Him: “Stay with us!” (Lk 24:29). They invite the interesting stranger into their own home. Otherwise, He would have gone on. As Henry Nouwen unfolded, this invitation shows the spiritual attitude for a fruitful celebration of the Eucharist (Nouwen 1994, pp. 53–61). We often start from a different perspective: Christ is the one who invites us. His call precedes and we come to him. This is true, but the disciples of Emmaus show another essential aspect: they invite him.

The right attitude for the Eucharist begins with inviting Jesus into our lives. Without this personal invitation, the Mass ultimately remains an external ritual and superficial. Of course, even then, Christ is truly present in the consecrated gifts. But for the Eucharist to be fruitful for us personally, we need to invite Jesus into our own lives.

We also know this from everyday encounters: We meet someone on vacation, sit next to someone on the plane or train, and have an interesting conversation. Maybe we can even refer to the conversation with another person later. But when the other one asks us who that was, we cannot give an answer. “I don’t know. Everyone has gone their own way”. Without a personal invitation, the other person remains a stranger in the end. Only when we invite someone does he/she become part of our life. This is the attitude for the Eucharist: we invite Christ into our lives. We can sincerely ask: Do we want Him to enter freely into all the rooms of our interior and see everything? The Eucharistic part begins with this personal invitation to Christ.

And then something exciting happens at Emmaus and in the Eucharist. The guest becomes the host. He is in the center, He is the “main celebrant”. The one they invited gives them spiritual nourishment. The more we invite Christ, the more Christ unites himself with our own life. Then, Christ and our lives become one.

This shows again the connection of liturgy and life for liturgical catechesis and that the desire for God—“Stay with us!”—is kind of the basis for the encounter with Christ. Liturgical catechesis builds upon the desire that people have. It wants to show how Christ fulfills their desire for meaning, for joy, for God. This desire corresponds to an even stronger longing of Christ to stay with His disciples, from His earthly time up to the present. Also,

in the Emmaus account, Christ seems to go on in order to not impose Himself but the whole manner with which He was conversing with the two disciples, and His immediate entry into their home demonstrates His personal desire to dine with them. This is exactly the starting point of Desiderio Desideravi.

2.3. “He Took Bread”—Understanding the Symbols

Then, the account continues: “while he was with them at the table, he took bread” (Lk 24:30). This corresponds to the preparation of the gifts. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* highlights the “spiritual efficacy and significance” (GIRM 2003, no. 73) of the preparation of and the procession with the gifts. It means bringing our own life to the altar, as the priest says in the prayer, “fruit of the earth and work of human hands” (The Roman Missal 2011, p. 529). We bring our work, all our doing, into the paten. The Eucharist begins with what we bring in: our life, the tasks we have, our activities and efforts, the parish, and the people we care for and have in mind. All that we bring is symbolized in bread and wine. Hence, bread and wine become symbols of ourselves. Sacrosanctum Concilium 48 states: “by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they [the faithful] should learn also to offer themselves”.

The act of bringing the gifts is already an expression of our own self-giving to Christ, who then takes this on and includes it into His own self-giving to the Father, as we celebrate in the Eucharistic prayer. Therefore, bringing is itself already a symbolic action. In addition, bread and wine are a result of a paschal process of dying and rising. Planting, growing, harvesting, baking, or fermenting is a process of dying and rising (Irwin 2020, p. 36). So, the fruit of the earth, worked by human hands, really becomes food for us: bread and wine. The gifts are a perfect symbol of what they will signify in real terms: the Paschal Mystery. There are two processions to the altar: the offertory procession when we bring the gifts and the communion procession when we go forward to receive the transformed gift. Josef Andreas Jungmann wonderfully said, “The heavenly gift has an earthly beginning” (Jungmann 2003, p. 4). It begins with what we bring into the Eucharist. It begins with our life given into it.

For liturgical catechesis, this highlights on the one hand the connection of liturgy and life again, and on the other hand, the importance of understanding the symbols and the symbolic actions. As the symbols are central to the liturgical celebration, their understanding is pivotal for liturgical catechesis, as Desiderio Desideravi also underscores (Francis 2022, no. 26–28, 44–53; see Section 3.2 in this article).

2.4. “He Said the Blessing”—Participating in the Prayers

The Emmaus account goes on: “While he was with them at table, he took bread and said the blessing”, which we call the Eucharistic prayer. There is a great need to highlight the participation in the Eucharistic prayer because it is not only the most important part of the Eucharist but also the part with the lowest participation of the faithful. It often goes in one ear and out the other. However, it is the essential point of the Eucharist, and therefore, the task consists in highlighting the participation in it. As developed in the following paragraphs, in the Eucharistic prayer, we participate in the praise of Christ (from the preface and the doxology); we participate in the transubstantiation (institution narrative); in the self-giving and resurrection of Christ (anamnesis); in receiving the Holy Spirit (epiclesis); and in the prayer of the Church (intercessions). It is important for liturgical catechesis to focus on participation because that helps to make the instruction more practical and oriented toward the faithful. The task is not to explain the Eucharistic prayer from beginning to end but to try to tell how the faithful in the pews can really participate in that prayer. So, liturgical catechesis chooses a more concrete and practical way by going through these acts of participation.

Praying the Eucharistic prayer, regardless of silently in the pews or loudly at the altar, means participating in the praise of Christ. We start in the preface “always and everywhere to give you thanks”, “to sing the hymn of your glory”, “to acclaim without end”, and so

forth (*The Roman Missal 2011*, pp. 534–631). Looking through the Eucharistic prayers, we regularly find the theme of praise and thanksgiving. In the first one: “For them, we offer you this sacrifice of praise” (*The Roman Missal 2011*, p. 636); in the second: “giving thanks that you have held us worthy. . .” (*The Roman Missal 2011*, p. 648); in the third: “we offer you in thanksgiving this holy and living sacrifice” (*The Roman Missal 2011*, p. 653); or in the fourth: “they [the communicants] may truly become a living sacrifice in Christ to the praise of your glory” (*The Roman Missal 2011*, p. 660). At the doxology at the end, lifting up the gifts: “all honor and glory is yours” (*The Roman Missal 2011*, p. 662). We all participate in the praise of Christ.

The Eucharistic Prayer is also about participating in the transubstantiation. People need to know what transubstantiation means: the substance, the essence, changes, while the accidents, the exterior, remain the same. In modern scientific language, however, we use substance in a different way. Clearly, on a physical–chemical level, nothing happens; the outward appearance looks the same before and after the transubstantiation.¹⁰ However, the bread ceases simply to be bread because it is wholly taken up by Christ and becomes His Body through His Word, through the Spirit, through the whole Eucharistic Prayer. The priest is called to pronounce the words of Christ, acting in the person of Christ the Head: “This is My Body/Blood”. On the one hand, these words indicate a clear difference. Of course, it is not the priest’s personal body, but it is Christ to whom he lends his voice, who sets His Body and Blood present. On the other hand, these words also speak of a clear identification: for the priest speaks these very words that Jesus said. And thus, he identifies himself with Christ every time he speaks the words of institution. It is beautiful when, as a priest, one lifts the chalice and sees his own face reflected in it. The spoken words and the visual experience remind the priest of his identification with Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist. Priests are called and empowered to act in His name or person. But here, again, it is not simply about a rite and not only about the priest. Rather, it is about one’s own transformation, a “personal transubstantiation” in the consecration.¹¹ The goal is that also the faithful inwardly participate in these words and make them personal in saying: “Jesus, here is my body; here is my blood. Receive it. The external may remain the same: my tasks in work, family, daily life, etc. But what I am, my thinking, my will, take it, seize it, and divinize it”. Our activities are the accidents. But what can change is ourselves. The goal is the personal participation in these words both for the laity and the priest (for the priest it is even more apparent because he pronounces these words). It is about the real transubstantiation not only of bread and wine but of all who participate and become the body of Christ.

The Eucharist is the celebration of Christ’s death, the representation of His self-giving, the anamnesis of His sacrifice on the cross, and at the same time, it is the celebration of His resurrection. He puts His whole love that led Him to the cross into the host. It also contains the power of his resurrection. That is why we say, “We proclaim your death, O Lord; and profess your resurrection, until you come again” (*The Roman Missal 2011*, p. 640).

Since pictures are of great help for liturgical catechesis, a mosaic of the Last Supper in the former chapel of the seminary in Eichstätt, Germany might illustrate what we just reflected upon: Christ sits at the narrow front end of the table and is centrally put in the vanishing point of the picture. The disciples have their seats around the long table at both sides so that especially Christ and the long table come into focus. With this central perspective, the table becomes broader the closer it comes to the spectator. The specialty is that the table of the mosaic merges directly into the altar table attached to the mosaic so that the altar represents the open side of the table. The two-dimensional mosaic flows into the altar in the chapel. They have the same dimensions and so make clear: what Christ has performed with His disciples at the last supper, He continues with us today in the celebration of the Eucharist. This, precisely, is anamnesis, re-presentation. The insertion at the Mass of the Last Supper, “That is today” (*The Roman Missal 2011*, p. 308), applies not only to Holy Thursday but ultimately to every Mass. Christ comes toward us today and gives himself to us. At the same time, the reverse direction is true: by approaching the altar,

we go toward the exalted, risen Christ—a foretaste of eternal communion with Him and all the saints in heaven, in the feast forever. Hence, in the Eucharistic prayer, we participate in Christ's Paschal Mystery, in His dying and rising.

The Eucharistic prayer also leads to us to participate in the reception of the Holy Spirit. In the Latin Church, today's Eucharistic prayers have a double epiclesis, both on the gifts and on the communicants. While the calling of the Spirit on the gifts is obvious verbally ("sending down your Spirit upon them [gifts] like the dewfall"; [The Roman Missal 2011](#), p. 646) and evidenced by the priest holding his hands upon the gifts, the people are less aware of the epiclesis on themselves. The third Eucharistic prayer, for instance, is formulated as follows: "and filled with His Holy Spirit, we may become one body, one spirit in Christ". ([The Roman Missal 2011](#), p. 653). It is very easy for the Holy Spirit to change bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. But it is much harder for Him to change us! Yet that is the goal of the celebration. The ultimate goal also of liturgical catechesis is not just that we get *informed* about the Eucharist but that we become *transformed* by it.

In the upper room in Jerusalem, two events took place: the Last Supper, obviously, but also Pentecost. The Mass combines them both. The celebration of the Eucharist is also a renewal of Pentecost. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is happening every time we celebrate. However, to realize this, liturgical catechesis is needed to sensitize the people to the spiritual reality they enter. In synthesis, liturgical catechesis helps to participate personally in what we celebrate.

Listening to and speaking the Eucharistic prayer also means to participate in the prayer of the Church. In the intercessions for the living and the deceased members of the Church, we often say "Remember" (e.g., [The Roman Missal 2011](#), pp. 636, 642, 648f., 655, 661, etc.). The Latin word for "Remember" is "re-cor-dare", "cor" meaning "the heart". The German liturgist Theodor Schnitzler has a wonderful explanation for this word: "God goes into His inside, into His heart and brings out His mercy from there. When God goes into Himself, He finds only love there. God's remembrance is salvation" ([Schnitzler 1968](#), p. 134). We do not remind God as if He needed a reminder. His remembering makes His salvation present to those we pray for. By saying "We offer for. . .", we place those for whom we pray into what we celebrate, into the self-giving of Christ, and we ask that Christ's salvation may profit them.

These explanations are already liturgical catechesis. Its purpose is to open our eyes to the richness of the prayers—or in the words of Desiderio Desideravi: "to acquire the capacity to comprehend the eucharological texts" ([Francis 2022](#), no. 35). Even if we know these prayers by heart, by really focusing on the meaning of the well-known words, we can go deeper and participate more attentively in the Eucharist. This is true for both priests and the faithful.

2.5. "He Gave the Bread to Them and Vanished from Their Sight"—Transformed by the Mystery

The Emmaus account moves into the communion rite: "He took bread, said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them". The breaking of bread, "which gave the entire Eucharistic Action its name in apostolic times" ([GIRM 2003](#), no. 83), has two main meanings. The first significance is being a sign of unity and communion. The *General Instruction to the Roman Missal* says "The many believers become one body by receiving the one bread of life". This obviously goes back to 1 Cor 10:17: "Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf". The Didache, a Syrian Church order around 100 AD, expresses it similarly.¹²

At the same time, the breaking of the bread is a sign of the passion of Christ, who has been "broken" on the cross. The accompanying song "Lamb of God", taken from John the Baptist pointing to Christ (John 1:29), highlights that according to the Johannine chronology, Christ died at the exact moment that the Paschal lambs were slaughtered in the temple. As St. Paul says, "For our Paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7).¹³ Both interpretations, the passion and the community explanation, are closely connected: as Christ gave Himself, so we can have communion with God and with one another.

For liturgical catechesis, it is important to explain the significance of the rites, as well as the biblical origins of the rituals, the prayers, and the accompanying songs. Liturgical catechesis has to help people “make sense” of the signs and actions they see or perform.

It is often helpful to use pictures for liturgical catechesis, both classical and modern ones. For example, a painting of the Emmaus account by the German artist and priest Sieger Köder (1925–2015), which can easily be found online, depicts the exact moment when Christ vanished after giving them the bread: “With that their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, but He vanished from their sight”. Köder painted a great warm light in the middle. The picture can be used at school or for first communion preparation. Asked “Where is Christ in this picture?”, the children nearly always say “in the light!” After briefly reflecting on the follow-up question “Where else?”, they call out: “in the bread and wine!” In the picture, the apostle on the right is still looking into the light, wondering where Christ might be, whereas the other one has already recognized Him in the bread he is holding in his hands and looking at. He has pulled his prayer shawl over his head.

The vanishing of Christ, depicted by the artist, happens also at communion. Christ is in us, and therefore, we do not see Him anymore. He is not visible in the sacrament anymore because we have taken Him into our hearts. Joseph Ratzinger explains this in a profound article on transubstantiation by pointing to the “[d]ialectic between Here and Not Here, between Already and Not yet [. . .]: Christ is here, and yet he is the Hidden One; he is near and yet completely Other, the One who gives himself and yet the One whom we cannot control, who instead controls us” (Ratzinger 2014, p. 241f). This is a wonderful statement of what happened: “He vanished from their eyes”.

Applied to liturgical catechesis, this cautions against overexplaining every detail. The mysteries we celebrate may remain a “mystery”, but mystery not understood in the sense of a secret or something we are not able to understand but rather understood in a sacramental way, that the divine presence is coming into our life. One needs to keep in mind that the liturgy is first of all a celebration, not an explanation. Rightly, the *Directory of Catechesis* calls the task “leading into the mystery”. (Pontifical Council 2020, p. 81f). In Desiderio Desideravi, Pope Francis speaks of the “amazement before the Paschal Mystery [as] an essential part of the liturgical act” (Francis 2022, no. 24).

The Emmaus account continues as follows: “Then they said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?’” They recognized the effects of Christ’s presence as he was acting on them on the way and during the meal. Just after having recognized him, they “said to each other”. This means that, although they are alone again, they are now more deeply connected and united than they had been before. Up to the present, recognizing Christ in the liturgy and in us opens our minds toward recognizing those around us. “Communion creates community” (Nouwen 1994, p. 75). This reminds us that liturgical catechesis always has an ecclesial dimension, which goes beyond the feeling of just “Jesus and me”. Obviously, personal value and benefit are important, especially for our individual mentality today, but the liturgy is first a communal reality to which the catechesis needs to introduce. It also demonstrates the advantages of celebrating together and the experience of being a part of the body of Christ.

“So they set out at once”, Luke continues, “and they returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them” (Lk 24:33). They were so transformed that at once they went home to announce this great news to the others. Before having recognized Christ, they were concerned that the day was almost over, but now the darkness does not matter anymore because they have the light of Christ in themselves. In the right scene of his painting, Sieger Köder shows the disciples on their way home, and one is holding an Easter candle. Christ is burning in them; He is the light showing them the way. They received Christ and are now sharing the good news. Not only the account is about receiving and giving. The same dynamic of receiving Christ in the liturgy and bringing him into our ordinary life should permeate every Eucharist, as the dismissal beautifully articulates: “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life”. or “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord” (The Roman Missal 2011, p. 673). The celebration of the Mass leads

us to a Eucharistic life.¹⁴ The turning point (literally!) of the Emmaus account reminds us that liturgical catechesis is not first of all our own doing, but it is God who transforms. Of course, we try to do our best, but it is not our methods that make the conversion. This is reassuring and relieving: It is God who acts through us and with us.

2.6. Conclusion

The way of the disciples of Emmaus is also our way in the celebration of the Eucharist. For them, it was a way from doubt to faith, from despair to hope, from fear to love, a way to a burning heart. What we celebrate, we are called to live: liturgy and life. So, we are called to listen to Christ's Word. We invite Him to stay with us (and so obtain the right attitude for the Eucharist). We bring our lives to Him (preparation of the gifts). In praise and thanksgiving (Eucharistic prayer), we get transformed by the Holy Spirit (epiclesis), receive Him in communion, and then proclaim Him with joy and confidence. Joy is very important for a successful liturgical catechesis.

St. Augustine says, "Receive what you are". (*Sermo 272*; [Augustine 2010](#), p. 77). This can also be switched around: "Be what you receive". This means to be the bread in the hands of Christ. As Christ took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it, so Christ takes us as His bread, into His own hands, into His service. He blesses us so that we can give ourselves as He gave himself as the bread of life. The fascinating point is that the Emmaus account is a continuous story. When we have Christ in us and go on our way home from the Eucharist to all the people we minister to, we take in the place that Christ had at the beginning with the disciples of Emmaus. We will meet people who are disappointed, who say "We were hoping that..." (Lk 24:21), who are downcast. And it is Christ in us who through us meets them as He met the disciples on the road of Emmaus. And so, we bring them the power of the resurrection and the love of Christ.

Again, the Emmaus story is a continuous story. It goes on every time we celebrate the Mass. Similarly, liturgical catechesis is an ongoing process, which needs to transform us first but then also those we minister to.

3. Principles of Liturgical Catechesis and Their Pastoral Applications

From the biblical part on the disciples of Emmaus, several points emerged that are relevant for liturgical catechesis. In this second part, these points will be systematized into six principles. Some practical examples try to demonstrate the pastoral application of these principles.

3.1. Liturgy and Life

If the liturgy is separated from our life, the liturgy becomes irrelevant. In today's mentality, people typically ask, "What do I get out of it? What benefits do I have from going to the liturgy?" Therefore, liturgical catechesis always needs to highlight the connection between liturgy and life ([Ostdiek 1998](#), pp. 80–82) and to present the liturgy as a source for our lives.

Liturgical catechesis builds upon the desire that people have and wants to foster it: the desire for meaning in their lives, for joy, for fulfillment. James Pauley highlights that liturgical catechesis helps to cultivate the desire for God ([Pauley 2017b](#), pp. 2–19). "From this place of desire, and only from this vital position, will each of us assume personal responsibility to discover how the sacramental encounter can be all that the Church says it is" ([Pauley 2017a](#), p. 91). At the same time, liturgical catechesis should make people aware of Christ's desire to celebrate with them as He had with His disciples (see Lk 22:15). In Desiderio Desideravi, Pope Francis prominently underlines his desire as the starting point for understanding and celebrating the liturgy, as the name of the document already indicates ([Francis 2022](#), no. 2, 4, 6, 20, 57, 65).

The connection between liturgy and life can be illustrated through testimonials. On several of the days of liturgical formation on the Mass which the German Liturgical Institute organizes, we have integrated witnesses. After the explanation of the liturgical rite, gestures,

and symbols (as carried out in the first part of the article), we invite laypeople to give witness to what the liturgical celebration means for their own lives. What does the Word of God mean to them? What do they bring into the preparation of the gifts? Listening to the testimonials helped the people to do the same in following small group discussions. In our experience, the combination of liturgical explanation and personal witnesses is the strength of these days, which we offer both for priests and laity. Paul VI already wrote in 1975—and this might apply even more today—“Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (Paul VI 1975, no. 21). Of course, those who explain the rites are witnesses themselves, but to combine it with testimonials of people without special theological training is encouraging because it demonstrates that everyone is able to speak about their liturgical and spiritual experiences.

Here is a concrete example: At a preparatory evening for the parents of first communion kids, why not invite some parents of the former years who have been rejoining the parish because of the good experiences they had with their own children?¹⁵ One couple said how they received new impulses for their own faith through the preparation for First Communion. “At first, we thought that we were doing that only for our child. But then we discovered the parish anew and the Sunday became a special day for us as a family. First the Mass and then a nice meal at home”. They not only accompanied the children but wanted to know more for themselves. The parish also had an adult formation on the Eucharist which completed that experience. All this really transformed them. It was a pleasure listening to what they told the group.

Surely, similar experiences exist in many parishes. There are people who had never come before and then somehow popped up and got involved. To bring them as an example for other parents is more powerful than just the priests recommending the whole family to participate. If the parents themselves tell it to other parents from their own experience, it makes a difference. Moreover, this attempts to address the widespread problem that parents simply drop off their children for Mass and then go somewhere else. By highlighting the meaning of the Mass for the family during the time of First Communion preparation, one can at least try to confront this difficulty.

To find these witnesses, there is this simple advice: “encourage, encourage, encourage”. The testimonies do not need to be long; a minute is enough (they get longer anyway). When people describe and evaluate their experiences, nobody can object, because it is their personal testimony of what the Lord has done for and with them. Often, it is easier to have a Q&A or dialogue instead of simply asking people to share their experiences. While choosing the speakers, it is important to provide a certain variety of witnesses and not only those with seemingly perfect stories (who pray two rosaries every day. . .). Then the majority would rightly object because they cannot relate to them. Here is a concrete example: At an evening for young people on the Eucharist, one of the witnesses did not show up and a seminarian stepped in. He did a very nice job, but afterward, the young people said in the small group discussion “That a seminarian is able to do that nicely was no surprise. But that Mary gave such a wonderful testimony, that really was impressive”. This experience also highlights the meaning of the witnesses. There was even one witness who said: “I have not completely grasped everything, but what I now know amazes me. And I want to go deeper into that”. In a sense, she was a perfect witness, not because she knew everything, but because she wanted to know more and people could relate to it. Witnesses often steer the desire for God better than any text could.

3.2. Understanding Symbols

Pope Francis highlights the pivotal meaning of symbols in Desiderio Desideravi by going back to the liturgical movement (Hauerland 2018, pp. 165–205; Pecklers 1998). Pope Francis quotes Romano Guardini (1885–1968): “Here there is outlined the first task of the work of liturgical formation: man must become once again capable of symbols”. (Francis 2022, no. 44). This is the very first sentence of Guardini’s book on “Liturgical formation”, which he wrote in 1923, exactly 100 years ago (recent English translation: Guardini 2022,

pp. 9–83). There, he described the theoretical background for his practical explanation of the symbols that he offered marvelously in his small booklet on “Sacred Signs” the year before (1922). It not only impressed his contemporaries but is a beneficial and easy read for today as well. That is why it has been reprinted many times up to the present (Guardini 2011). Pope Francis continues, “This is a responsibility for all, for ordained ministers and the faithful alike. The task is not easy because modern man has become illiterate, no longer able to read symbols; it is almost as if their existence is not even suspected. [. . .] To have lost the capacity to grasp the symbolic value of the body and of every creature renders the symbolic language of the Liturgy almost inaccessible to the modern mentality. And yet there can be no question of renouncing such language. It cannot be renounced because it is how the Holy Trinity chose to reach us through the flesh of the Word. It is rather a question of recovering the capacity to use and understand the symbols of the Liturgy. We must not lose hope because this dimension in us, as I have just said, is constitutive” (Francis 2022, no. 44f). He highlights the general importance of the symbols (Driscoll 1998, pp. 67–75).

It is helpful to shed some light on the context and then consider practical steps. Guardini’s “Sacred Signs” starts with the sign of the cross: “When we cross ourselves, let it be with a real sign of the cross. Instead of a small, cramped gesture that gives no notion of its meaning, let us make a large unhurried sign, from forehead to breast, from shoulder to shoulder, consciously feeling how it includes the whole of us, our thoughts, our attitudes, our body and soul, every part of us at once. How it consecrates and sanctifies us” (Guardini 2011, p. 9). He goes on to say the cross is the “Sign of the universe and the sign of our redemption” (Guardini 2011, p. 9). He explains that we make it before prayer to collect ourselves and after prayer to maintain what God has granted us. We sign ourselves in temptations to be strengthened. After the sign of the cross, Guardini writes about our movements and gestures like folding our hands, kneeling, standing, walking, and striking the breast. He continues with parts of a church building: steps, doors, candles, holy water, fire, ashes, incense, and light. In the Eucharistic part, Guardini meditates on bread and wine, the altar cloth, the altar itself, the chalice, the paten, and finally, more in general, on blessings, sanctified spaces, bells, sanctified time, and the name of God.

A parish published one chapter of “Sacred Signs” at a time in their bulletin. It was amazing how many people reacted positively to it and expressed their appreciation. Some people even said that they have since kept all the bulletins with Guardini’s texts.

In 2022, on the 100th anniversary of its publication, we created an online advent calendar with short videos on each one of the 24 chapters. With this project, we got students involved and made the content of the book accessible to them and to a wider audience of the diocese. This could easily be done with a group of altar servers or the like. In the process, we discussed together what parts were more essential and shortened the texts (Benini 2022a, pp. 275–77).¹⁶

Another practical way of bringing these thoughts to life is to use them in the homily, which is a very good place for liturgical catechesis. A lot of people have questions about why we are performing certain signs and actions. One could simply integrate some of Guardini’s “Sacred Signs”, for instance, the sign of the cross on the Trinity Sunday, the striking on the breast when referring to the gospel of the publican (Lk 18:13), or explaining the folding of the hands when talking about prayer. How about an explanation of why we use candles and incense during the proclamation of the gospel? One student said, “If I had known that this was done because the emperor at the time was accompanied with incense and torches when he came to the city to give a speech, I would have held the candle in a different way, knowing that it indicates Christ coming and speaking to us”. It is worth explaining the meaning of common phrases like “Lift up your hearts”.

3.3. Active Participation

A third principle of liturgical catechesis is not to simply inform people about a liturgical rite but to focus on how they can participate in it. Mark Searle distinguishes “three levels of active participation” (Searle 2006, pp. 15–45). The first level is participation in ritual

behavior. It is about participating in what people see and hear, kind of on the surface level. Even those who do not believe in God but go to church can perceive what is going on with their eyes; they can see the signs and symbols. They can follow the gestures and postures; they can listen to the spoken words and the singing.

This seeing, listening, doing—in other words, participating in the ritual actions— involves into the community that celebrates and leads step by step into becoming the body of Christ. Searle calls this the second level, “the participation in the liturgy of the Church and the work of Christ” (Searle 2006, p. 27). Similarly, Pope Francis says in *Desiderio Desideravi*: “I think of all the gestures and words that belong to the assembly: gathering, careful walking in procession, being seated, standing, kneeling, singing, being in silence, acclamations, looking, listening. There are many ways in which the assembly, as one body (Ne 8:1) participates in the celebration. Everybody doing together the same gesture, everyone speaking together in one voice—this transmits to each individual the energy of the entire assembly. It is a uniformity that not only does not deaden but, on the contrary, educates individual believers to discover the authentic uniqueness of their personalities not in individualistic attitudes but in the awareness of being one body” (Francis 2022, no. 51).

Experiencing the community of the Church is not the final aim. On the contrary, the desire is to lead deeper to an encounter with Christ, to participate in the Paschal Mystery that the Church celebrates. Searle calls this third level the “participation in the life of God” (Searle 2006, p. 37). We also know from empirical studies that people find a liturgical celebration “good” and helpful when they really come in contact with God and can experience His presence (Benini 2021, p. 303f). The liturgy brings us from the outside to the inside, from an external participation to an actual encounter. Liturgical catechesis should focus on bringing people from the outside to a participation which truly happens on the inside. It should help to get to the meaning itself, to the Paschal Mystery, to the encounter with God.

3.4. Explanation and Experience

At the beginning of his first mystagogical catechesis, Cyril of Jerusalem (313–386) highlights the experience of the newly baptized which makes them more open for the liturgical catechesis: “[L]ong have I desired to address you concerning these spiritual and heavenly mysteries. But because I well know that the eye is better than the ear, I awaited the present occasion so as to find you, from your own experience, ever more open to my words so that I might take your hand and lead you into the brighter and more perfumed meadow of paradise” (*Mystagogicae catecheses* 1.1; Cyril 2010, p. 326). He explained the liturgical rites not in advance but based on the experience of the participants. We can compare his approach to using a modern guidebook for travel. If we read the guidebook in advance of our travels, it might be interesting and informative, but only when we arrive at the place itself can we comprehend what the guidebook was talking about. Only then does it really speak to us. The same is true for liturgical catechesis: when we have an explanation and an experience at the same time, we can relate to the explanation. Catherine Dooley rightly states “The process of catechesis moves from the reflection on the rite to personal experience” (Dooley 2004, p. 14). In addition, the mystagogical catecheses of the Church fathers remind us of the opportunity of preaching on liturgical signs in combination with scripture.¹⁷

Using art might also be helpful, since good art conveys more than words. Pope Francis says liturgical catechesis is to “aid in the contemplation of the beauty and truth of Christian celebration” (Francis 2022, no. 1), and beauty and truth in this case simply mean encountering Christ (Francis 2022, no. 10).

There needs to be a healthy balance between the content that the catechist presents and the experience that people can have with it. Knowledge and experience are like the two focal points of an ellipse and form a force field in which both keep each other healthy. Initiating into the liturgy is not possible without experience and cannot be taught by theory alone. Liturgy is learned by participation but also the other way around: a mere

experience without being solidly instructed cannot introduce one to the depth and richness of the liturgy.

Explanation (theory) and experience (praxis) go together, as the *Lex credendi* is inseparable from the *Lex orandi*. What we pray and celebrate, we believe, and what we believe, we express in the liturgy. Both aim at a relationship with God that is not simply theoretical knowledge but that lives above all from practicing this relationship. This reminds us that liturgical theology, a theology drawn from and put into practice during the liturgical celebration, is an important source for liturgical catechesis (Dooley 2005, pp. 79–85; Raiche 2020, pp. 26–29; Kavanagh 1992; Fagerberg 2004; 2016, pp. 3–22; Irwin 2018).

Moreover, liturgical catechesis should also convey joy about the festive character of the liturgy (Pontifical Council 2020, no. 82). Liturgy is a celebration more than it is an explanation. The disciples of Emmaus illustrate this well: their joy became the energy to return to the other apostles (despite the night) and to live out what they have experienced. Similarly, today, a joyful attitude makes liturgical catechesis and the liturgy itself attractive and effective.

3.5. Sunday as Gift

Pope Francis states in *Desiderio Desideravi*: “Sunday, before being a precept, is a gift that God makes for his people; and for this reason the Church safeguards it with a precept. The Sunday celebration offers to the Christian community the possibility of being formed by the Eucharist” (Francis 2022, no. 66). He emphasizes the Sunday Mass because it is itself already a living liturgical catechesis: the Eucharist forms us. Practical questions arise: When should the catechesis for children take place? There is no best solution. Conducting it on Sunday has advantages as well as disadvantages. An advantage may be that the children not only come to Sunday School but also participate in the Mass itself, accompanied by their parents. A possible disadvantage is that children of divorced parents may only be able to come every other week.

In any case, it is important to have elements for children in the Sunday Mass. Children are used to participating in events and activities of adults, including Mass. Even if they are not able to understand everything, they can understand something, and so they learn. However, they need to feel welcomed and appreciated. Even a few words in the homily, directed to the children, might be enough to address them. Parents will also realize that the priest actually has noticed their children. It is also possible to gather them around the altar for the Our Father, which is already practiced in many parishes, and then to send them out as messengers of peace. After the invitation to offer each other the sign of peace, they bring that peace from the altar back to their families or the whole congregation in the pews. There are additional ways to involve children in the proclamation of the word. When the homily addresses the children at the beginning, it is possible to call them out before the Alleluia and have them around the ambo during the Gospel proclamation (it has an effect on the reader, too). Here is an example: In a parish, a so-called “Advent mystery” for children was introduced. It was simply a star made from yellow cardboard placed in front of the ambo. At the beginning of each homily, one child was called to open the “doors” of the star and make visible a picture glued behind, which depicted a simple, kid-friendly drawing of a symbol for the Sunday Gospel and its core message, for example, “Be vigilant and pray” (Lk 21:36), with a clock for the first Sunday of Advent, then for the other Sunday’s gospels, “Prepare the way for the Lord” (Lk 3:4) with a road construction sign, “Rejoice in the Lord” (Phil 4:4) with a smiley, and “Blessed are you who believes” (Lk 1:45) with an icon of Mary visiting Elisabeth. After the Mass, they received a sticker depicting the Sunday’s symbol. If they attended every Sunday, they could eventually collect all four of them and have a complete set. Each year, a group of mothers had good ideas for how to present the Advent mystery (star, cross made of four pictures, lantern with four sides, etc.).

3.6. The Priest as Catechist of Catechists

The *Directory of Catechesis* highlights that the “pastor is the first catechist in the parish” (Pontifical Council 2020, no. 116). Catechesis is not something that the pastoral assistants or volunteers exclusively perform but also one of the first tasks of a parish priest. He is to provide catechetical information for the laity “as catechist of catechists” (Pontifical Council 2020, no. 116). Because the priest is so close to the mystery of the Eucharist, it should be obvious that he should use his experience to teach others.

Moreover, Pope Francis encourages trust in the *ars celebrandi*: “One way of caring for and growing in a vital understanding of the symbols of the Liturgy is certainly the *ars celebrandi*” (Francis 2022, no. 48). “For an artisan, technique is enough. But for an artist, in addition to technical knowledge, there has also to be inspiration, which is a positive form of possession. The true artist does not possess an art but rather is possessed by it [...] allowing the celebration itself to convey to us its art” (Francis 2022, no. 50). Again, the idea of the liturgy shaping the congregation appears. Regarding the priests, the pope continues: “It is as if he were placed in the middle between Jesus’ burning heart of love and the heart of each of the faithful, which is the object of the Lord’s love. To preside at Eucharist is to be plunged into the furnace of God’s love. When we are given to understand this reality, or even just to intuit something of it, we certainly would no longer need a Directory that would impose the proper behavior” (Francis 2022, no. 57). It is not necessary because the liturgy itself cultivates the right attitude. If the priests celebrate consciously and prayerfully, this helps the faithful as well. As Pope Benedict XVI stated: “The *ars celebrandi* is the best way to ensure their [the people’s] *actuosa participatio*” (Benedict XVI 2007, no. 38).

While preparing a Sunday family Mass, it is important to keep a balance for all participants and to avoid having too much for children and too little for adults. With best intentions, there can be the risk that the Mass becomes childish, and the adults might get annoyed. However, children can often only attend Mass if their parents are eager to accompany them.¹⁸ It is important to prepare liturgies for children with the adults in mind. This is particularly important for the homily, which needs to address children and their parents without forgetting the other “normal” faithful.

A highly motivated catechist/priest might face another danger: explaining everything out of good intentions and commenting too much. There is definitely a real need for liturgical catechesis. However, it is important to explain without getting lost in details. One can compare the celebration of the liturgy with a spinning top (Taft 2001, p. 192). It is fascinating to see a top spinning on its own axis and how it stays upright for a long time. But trying to explain the centrifugal forces in relation to the angle of the inclination, etc., misses the point. This can also be transferred to liturgical catechesis. Too much explanation within the celebration, especially in places where the liturgy does not foresee explications, endangers the celebratory quality or the flow of the liturgy. It is about beauty and truth, as Desiderio Desideravi mentions several times (Francis 2022, no. 1, 10, 21f., 24f., 62, 65). “Liturgy is the faith of the church in motion” (Fagerberg 2004, p. 94), not in explanation.

Another danger can consist in highlighting our own work too much, when it is God who does the essential work. It is the liturgy that ultimately forms us. Liturgical formation is not first about knowledge, but as Pope Francis says in accordance with Guardini, it is an “action of the Spirit who operates through it [the celebration] until Christ be formed in us. (Cf. Gal 4:19) The full extent of our formation is our conformation to Christ. I repeat: it does not have to do with an abstract mental process, but with becoming Him” (Francis 2022, no. 41).

4. Conclusions—Amazement at the Paschal Mystery

The six principles have been, on the one hand, inspired by the Emmaus account as a biblical basis for liturgical formation. In a certain sense, this was an attempt to learn from the risen Christ himself as a model for liturgical catechesis. On the other hand, today’s pastoral needs, impulses of Desiderio Desideravi, practical experiences, and academic

reflections in the field of liturgical formation have guided the present considerations and the pastoral application of the six principles.

As the disciples of Emmaus were conversing with Jesus about all things that had occurred, the first principle underlined the connection between liturgy and life, which is pivotal to making the liturgy and therefore also liturgical catechesis relevant to the daily life of people; including testimonies can demonstrate its practical benefit.

The disciples recognized the risen Lord at the breaking of the bread. The second principle outlined the importance of symbols, which Pope Francis took over from Romano Guardini, and suggested methods to enhance their understanding.

Promoting active participation in the liturgy is a third important principle. It is a logical consequence of the conviction that the celebration itself forms the participants. Liturgical catechesis becomes more practical and effective when it not only explains the rites but also shows how people can participate in them personally.

Moreover, liturgical catechesis connects explanation and experience, as Christ did with His disciples and the mystagogical catecheses of the Church fathers demonstrated (fourth principle).

As Jesus encountered the disciples of Emmaus on the first day of the week, the fifth principle of liturgical formation highlights Sunday as a gift (see [Francis 2022](#), no. 66). The article outlines ways to integrate families into the Sunday Eucharist.

Finally, the last principle sheds light on the task of the priest as the “catechist of catechists”. This point discusses the *ars celebrandi*, as well as possible dangers or exaggerations in liturgical formation.

One of the main aspects that Pope Francis highlights in Desiderio Desideravi is common both to the Emmaus account and liturgical formation: amazement before the Paschal Mystery ([Francis 2022](#), no. 24). It is wonderfully depicted in Sieger Köder’s painting mentioned above. The two disciples of Emmaus are both amazed. One is somehow touched by the risen Lord, even if he does not understand how he could disappear from their sight, whereas the other one already reaches the deeper level and recognizes Christ’s presence in the Eucharist. Pope Francis says “The astonishment or wonder of which I speak is not some sort of being overcome in the face of an obscure reality or a mysterious rite. It is, on the contrary, marveling at the fact that the salvific plan of God has been revealed in the paschal deed of Jesus (cf. Eph 1:3–14), and the power of this paschal deed continues to reach us in the celebration of the ‘mysteries’, of the sacraments” ([Francis 2022](#), no. 25). This continuing power of Christ’s paschal deed is another commonality. Like the Emmaus account, liturgical formation is a continuous process in which we might realize how God is acting in us. Through liturgical catechesis, we help others to be ignited by Christ’s ongoing “reaching out”.

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Notes

- ¹ The article goes back to a talk given at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC for pastors and was a part of the program “Welcoming Children in Worship”. The oral style of presentation was maintained.
- ² See some commentaries on it: Pope [Francis \(2022\)](#). The whole issue of *Rivista di pastorale liturgica* of July 2022 is dedicated to it; [Benini \(2022b\)](#), pp. 189–91).
- ³ See, for example, [Jerome \(2020\)](#), pp. 356–71).

- ⁴ Pope Francis (2022) states in no. 34, according to the official English translation, “The first depends upon the second which is essential”. Other languages say more correctly: The first is in service of the second (“El primero está en función del segundo, que es esencial”; “Il primo è funzionale al secondo che è essenziale”; “Die Erste steht im Dienst der Zweiten, die wesentlich ist”).
- ⁵ Regarding liturgical catechesis, see also Pontifical Council (2020, no. 74, 76, esp. 95–98 and more often).
- ⁶ Other scholars also point to the Emmaus account in explicit reference to liturgical catechesis: Dooley (2004, p. 13) regards it “as a model for liturgical catechesis”. See also Ostdiek (1998, pp. 77, 80); Rosier (2020, p. 194f).
- ⁷ See, for instance, Pope John Paul II (2004), esp. regarding the liturgy of the Word: Pope Francis (2019b).
- ⁸ See Augustine (1954, *In Ioh.* 30.1., p. 289).
- ⁹ He continues: “We are only servants; what we proclaim is not our word, but God’s Word. Day by day, letters are read aloud that come from heaven”. See Kaczynski (1974, pp. 34–35).
- ¹⁰ See Ratzinger regarding our modern understanding of transubstantiation (Ratzinger 2014, p. 218; here esp. pp. 235–37).
- ¹¹ Sheen (2004, p. 21f) explains regarding the priest himself: “When I say, ‘This is My Body’, I must also mean ‘This is my body’; when I say ‘This is My Blood’, I must also mean, ‘This is my blood’”.
- ¹² Didache 9:4 (Didache 2010, p. 37): “As this broken bread, scattered over the mountains, was gathered together to be one, so may your Church be gathered together in the same manner from the ends of the earth into your kingdom”.
- ¹³ The Revelation of John also speaks of Christ as the Lamb of God (see esp. Rev 5; 14 and 19), as does the first reading on Good Friday from Isaiah: “Like a lamb led to slaughter or a sheep silent before shearers, he did not open his mouth” (Isa 53:7).
- ¹⁴ See the subtitle of Nouwen (1994).
- ¹⁵ We are preparing a video project for the diocese of Trier with testimonials of parents (and children) to encourage this practice and to provide a video if parents are not available in the local parish.
- ¹⁶ The videos are available online: https://theologie-trier.de/fileadmin/theofak/Benini/Guardini_Kalender.pdf (accessed on 27 November 2023).
- ¹⁷ Some Church fathers understood the liturgy as fulfillment or “antitype” of Scripture passages. See Benini (2024, pp. 264–67). On the various accentuations in the use of Scripture in the mystagogical catechesis, see Mazza (1989).
- ¹⁸ Several first communion kids say their first confession like this: “I would love to come, but my parents do not accompany me (and say it is not important to go)”.

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