Church Communities Worship

Teacher Background

Celebrations
In modern use, the word celebrate has strong overtones of festivity and joyful partying. Christians use the word ‘celebrate’ in its original sense of marking an important event with solemn ritual. For Christians, celebration is at the heart of worship. Church communities gather to worship God and to celebrate their life in Christ. Hence Christians celebrate a baptism, a wedding and a funeral. The Church marks important occasions in the life of the community and its members with various celebrations. For Catholics, celebration of the sacraments have first place, especially the Sunday celebration of Eucharist. Catholics also participate in various prayer services and processions to celebrate the liturgical seasons and saints’ days. The Church is a community that expresses its faith and relationship with God through celebration.

Reasons for Celebrating
The Church teaches that creatures depend upon God for existence and meaning. Human beings therefore, have a basic duty to acknowledge this dependence through worship. Worship is an act of reverence and honour shown to God. It encompasses dimensions of adoration, praise, thanksgiving, love and petition. It is both a personal and a community act. Worship can be expressed in many ways. Prayer is one of the commonest forms. Because worship deals with the spiritual dimension of life, symbol and ritual are appropriate modes of expression. Through symbol and ritual, Christians express their identity as a worshipping community and participate together in one of the deepest human activities.

Elements of a Celebration
The Church’s liturgy embodies the basic elements of good celebration. These same elements can be found in secular celebrations as diverse as university graduation and birthday or wedding festivities.

- Christians gather. A celebration brings people together. It is a means of expressing what is precious or important to a group. This coming together often involves people in actively preparing the celebration. It also fosters reconciliation, as differences are put aside to allow all to join fully in the celebration.

- Christians engage in dialogue. Good celebration gives a voice to all. It allows participants to listen to expressions of meaning and appreciation. It provides a means for each person present to respond and to contribute to the corporate statement of what is being celebrated.

- Christians share. Good celebration involves communion in what is being celebrated. This is commonly achieved through symbolic activities, such as a meal or other ritual act. For example, baptism symbolises sharing in Christ’s death and resurrection through a ritual of immersion in water.

- Christians are sent forth on mission. A community recognises that what it celebrates is of value to others and wishes to make it available to them. Good celebration voices this and usually concludes with a challenge to all present to take the fruit of celebration into the world to others.
**The Church Community Celebrates**

A Christian’s relationship with God has two dimensions, the personal and the communal. Each Christian needs to foster a personal relationship with God through prayer and a life lived in response to God’s grace. But we are also social beings, bound together in various communities that ultimately depend on God for their wellbeing. Church membership provides an important means for expressing and nourishing this social dimension of worship. The Church exists to continue Christ’s mission to proclaim and act for the reign of God in the world. The evangelising activity and the worship of the Church are oriented to making the reign of God real and active in the world. As they worship together, Christians gratefully express the supreme value of Christ to humanity, renew their own faith and relationship with God and share in the saving effects of Christ’s paschal mystery his life, death and resurrection. To be truly effective, celebration requires the meaningful and active participation of all present and the necessary education about and preparation for worship.

**The Liturgical Year**

Each year the Church celebrates its liturgy around a cycle of major themes and events associated with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Paschal Mystery. Advent reflects on humankind’s need of a saviour and the Incarnation as God’s response. Lent holds out Christ’s insistent call to conversion and new life. Holy Week celebrates the climax of Jesus’ saving action in his suffering, death and resurrection. The Easter season, concluding with Pentecost, explores the mystery of Christ's risen life shared by us in baptism. Ordinary Time (the major part of the year) leads us to consider what it means to live the Christian life in today's world. The liturgy recalls and celebrates annually the central mysteries of Christian faith and applies them to daily life.

**The Local Church Celebrates Special Events**

Whilst the central mystery of Christ is the primary focus of the Church’s liturgy everywhere, place is given to celebration of a more local nature. Of importance is the annual celebration of saints’ feast days in national, diocesan, parish and school contexts. Such celebrations can be accorded high priority and in some cultures, involve not only the liturgy, but also community festivities such as processions and carnivals. The liturgy also provides for community celebration of particular needs. In times of disaster or pressing need, the Church gathers in prayer to offer consolation and to ask divine help. Similarly, there are occasions for expressing gratitude, such as at harvest festival and on days of national remembrance (e.g. ANZAC Day). Significant community events such as the opening of a new church, school, or hospital are accompanied by blessing ceremonies. The annual blessing of the fleet is important in some fishing communities. Each day within the Mass and Prayer of the Church, the Intercessions (or Prayers of the Faithful) give voice to the particular needs and circumstances of the celebrating community. Popular devotions also have a role in the local Church’s life. The Rosary, Stations of the Cross, Eucharistic Devotion (which is part of the Church’s formal liturgy) and Penance Services are examples. These are forms of affective prayer, which appeal to religious feelings and meet the spiritual needs of many people in a way the formal liturgy may not.