

LITANY OF THE SAINTS DOCUMENT

The Litany of the Saints is used in the Sacred Liturgy at various times of the Liturgical Year, in the celebration of certain Sacraments and in the conferral of particular blessings.

The Litany is also used by many Catholics in their spiritual lives as an expression of their devotion to the Communion of Saints. The saints are privileged links which connect us to the mystery of Christ. They bear testimony to Him and the power of His grace operative in the Church. They are inspiring examples offered for imitation in our lives and efficacious intercessors ever ready to receive our prayers.

The Litany of the Saints has been in use since the time of Saint Gregory the Great (590 AD). From his mandate it was used in public processions of intercession and thanksgiving. It is named the Litany of the Saints, for the greater part of the prayer consists in invoking the Saints in glory, to which each of the congregation responds; “*ora pro nobis: pray for us: ruega por nosotros*

Following the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, the Church in her Liturgical Books, offers two forms of the Litany; one short and one long. The shorter form is used during the celebration of Mass with particular Rites: the Easter Vigil at the blessing of the Baptismal Font, the Dedication of a Church and the ordination Rites of Bishops, Priests and Deacons. The Rite of Baptism¹ and the rites associated with the pastoral care of the sick and dying² also provide for a truncated form of the litany.

The most official form of the Litany of the Saints³ is divided into sections and follows a logical structure which manifests the nature of the Church at prayer:

- a. The Introductory *Kyrie: Lord Have Mercy: Señor ten piedad*, with invocations to the Blessed Trinity. God alone is worshiped and offered adoration.
- b. The series of Saints. The Holy Ones are invoked; the Church replies; *ora pro nobis, pray for us, ruega por nosotros*. It is noted that Our Lady is always invoked before the other saints, because of the prerogatives given to her in the economy of salvation. To her is offered *hyperdulia*: this stresses her unique sanctity beyond that of other creatures and of all the angels and saints.
- c. Following her invocation, the heavenly court is invoked with the invocation of the Archangels and Angels. The intercession of the saints continues in sequence: the Prophets and Fathers in the Faith, the Apostles and followers of Christ, the Martyrs, the Bishops and Doctors, Priests and Religious men and women concluding with the lay saints. To the saints is offered the act of *dulia*; this type of veneration is offered to the saints because of their friendship with God and His grace of sanctification in them.
- d. Petition addressed to the Lord Jesus

¹ See page 380, The Rites Volume I, The Rite of Baptism for Children number 48, Rito del Bautismo numero 48 USCCB

² See page 863, The Rites Volume I, Pastoral Care of the Sick paragraph 219.

³ See page 549 The Rites Volume I, The Liturgical Press. For official Latin Text see *Graduale Romanum* page 479

- e. Petitions for Various needs. These invocations because of their intercessory content, replace the Prayer of the Faithful at a Mass in which the Litany is used
- f. Conclusion. Traditionally the Litany ends with an invocation to the Lord under the title *Agnus Dei: Lamb of God: Cordero de Dios*. This conclusion is omitted when the Litany is sung at Mass, because the congregation will chant the full *Agnus Dei* during the Rite of Communion

The Liturgy reminds us that it is always appropriate that the names of some saints may be added in the **proper place** such as the patron of the place, title of the Church, name of a founder but in a different **typeface**.⁴ Also permitted is the insertion of the patron saints of an ordinand⁵ or person to be baptized⁶. Similarly the Invocations may be adapted for individual occasions.

In the Ordinary form of the Roman Rite, the proper texts for the Litany of the Saints are found in the *Roman Missal*⁷ (Easter Vigil), the *Roman Pontifical*, Rites for Ordinations and particular blessings, the *Roman Ritual*, Rites for Christian Initiation and Pastoral care of the Sick. Other texts are not permitted in the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy.

In the use of the Litany of the Saints the following are born in mind:

- a. The Litany of the Saints is by nature a sung text. The rhythm and structure lend well the chanting of the prayer. Traditionally the Litany is led by a cantor or group of cantors with the congregation assisting with the responses.
- b. The pace should not be too quick or too slow. Both lead to frustration in prayer. It is therefore important that cantors master the art of this form of prayer, which is contemplative yet lively.
- c. As with all liturgical rites, it is the desire of the Church that the faithful be able to participate in a full, active and conscious way with the singing of the Litany. Complex melodies or responsories are not appropriate here. As a text that the congregation uses infrequently, it is wise to employ a text of the Litany that seeks the goal of noble simplicity
- d. The use of the proper text with liturgical chant in the Liturgical Books faithfully fulfills that aspiration
- e. The Latin setting of the Litany being the original form of the text and melody has its own appeal and can offer particular service to celebrations or liturgies that employ different languages. It is a text that will unite the different language groups in a single linguistic expression
- f. If it is not possible to chant the Litany in Latin or the vernacular because of impeded musical ability, it is fitting that the litany be recited in a prayerful manner by the cantor and congregation.

⁴ See page 549, The Rites Volume I, Rite of Baptism, Appendix, Litany of the Saints, Introductory Paragraph.

⁵ Rites of Ordination, numbers 42, 127 and 133, Roman Pontifical, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

⁶ Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, number 570, The Roman Ritual, ICEL.

⁷ See in each language edition of the Roman Missal, the texts used for the celebration of Baptism at the Easter Vigil.

