

Why do we worship?

There are many reasons why we may worship, reasons that vary within the life of a person and between persons. In fact, we may ask, is there a “best” answer to this question? Don’t we often hear, or perhaps even say ourselves, that the *motive* for why people come to worship isn’t important, just “so long as they (or we) are here”? Certainly, the reasons why each person may come to church are many. Who, after all, is to say what motives of ours the Holy Spirit may use to lead us to God?

This having been said, the Church herself, of which the baptized are a part, worships for particular ends, and if we wish to participate actively in the liturgy of the Church, “it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions” (*Constitution on the Liturgy* [=CSL], n.11). So, what are these reasons, according to the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, that the Church worships? Like the work of Jesus himself, the sacramental liturgy, the *Constitution* says, “is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God” (n.59).

The first reason, or, put another way, the final or end reason, why we worship is for God’s glory. The aim and object of all of the Church’s activities is that all of the baptized “should come together to praise God...” (CSL, n.10). At first it may seem odd that God wants us to worship him because he wants to be glorified. Isn’t this a bit *egocentric*? If it were a human being saying this (for example, if I were to write newspaper columns for my own glorification), then yes, this would be an example of an egomaniac, for it is not a part of human nature that we are to be worshipped. But, since it is God who desires and deserves our worship, then no, this is not out of character, for God—the all powerful, all knowing, all loving—is to be worshipped and praised and glorified. “You are God: we praise you!”, begins the ancient hymn, *Te Deum*.

The next reason, one very closely related to the first, why we worship is to become holy ourselves and sanctify all of creation as well. In the liturgy Jesus and his Church are “ceaselessly engaged in praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the whole world” (CSL, n.83; also n.10). These two ends—God’s glory and our sanctification—are closely related because the holier we and those around us become, the greater is God glorified. If we want to give God the greatest glory possible, then we must become saints!

Finally, we become saints and consequently give glory to God by our participation in the life and mission of the Church. Of the Council’s aims, one is to “promote union among all who believe in Christ” and to “strengthen whatever can help to call the whole of mankind into the household of the Church” (n.1). By the celebration of the liturgy, the Church is to become a sign to the nations, “under which the scattered children of God may be gathered together, until there is one sheepfold and one shepherd” (n.2). The best way that we know of to become holy is by our union with God and his saints in the Church.

All other reasons—“getting something” out of the homily, strengthening the parish family, receiving emotional strength—however worthy, are good only insofar as they serve to strengthen our bonds with the Church, make us holy, and, ultimately, glorify God.

By Christopher J. Carstens