

The Meanings of Words: CHURCH - MASS - EUCHARIST - LITURGY

Let's begin with the word **CHURCH**. The word as used today has many different though related meanings. The dictionary defines it variously as *a building for public worship; regular religious or public worship services; a local congregation of Christians; a distinct body of Christians having a common faith and discipline, such as a denomination; ecclesiastical organization and authority*. Our English word "*church*" itself comes from the Old English word "*circe*", which came from the Greek word meaning "*the Lord's house, or dwelling*". The Greek word in the New Testament that translates into the English '*church*' refers to the assembly or whole body of believers, the Community of Faith. This would be the sense or meaning of the word that corresponds most closely to the primary image of the Church found in the documents of the Second Vatican Council that speak of the Church as the ***People of God***. The word **MASS** comes from the Latin words addressed to the people at the conclusion of the Mass of the Roman Rite: *ite missa est*, which translates into English basically as *Go, you are dismissed*. I say "basically" because interestingly there is not complete agreement or understanding about just *exactly* what the phrase means, though it has been the concluding phrase of the Mass for centuries. We are most familiar with it as *The Mass is ended, go in peace*. **EUCHARIST** is the English equivalent of the Greek word for "*blessing*" or "*thanksgiving*". It is formed from the prefix "*eu-*" which means 'good' or 'well' {think of '*eulogy*' – the 'good words' spoken at a funeral} and "*charis*" which means '*favor*' or '*grace*' {think of someone who is said to have a '*charismatic*' personality, or who has a lot of '*charisma*'}. It commonly refers both to *the whole celebration* of the Mass which commemorates the Last Supper of Jesus, and to *the Sacrament* of the Eucharist, also called Holy Communion. **LITURGY** also comes from a compound Greek word and refers to "*the work of the people*". The two Greek words involved are '*laos*' meaning '*the people*' {think of our English word '*laity*' or '*lay*'} and '*ergon*' meaning '*work*' {think of '*energy*' or '*ergonomics*'}. Thus, the Liturgy is the work or service of worship we perform when we gather in church as Church, celebrating and receiving the Eucharist at Mass.