**Oblation Launch Essay**

Friends, I’d like to welcome you to the on-line journal, “Oblation: Liturgy and Evangelization.” Over the coming days, the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy will be presenting our vision for the journal, as well as offering the first articles for the journal. Yet, as we begin, I wanted to ask a question: Why the title *Oblation?* And what does it have to do with evangelization?

In Augustine’s City of God, in the context of an apologetic for Eucharistic sacrifice, the doctor of grace writes:

> Our heart is his altar when it is lifted up to him; we plead to him by his Only-begotten priest; we offering bleeding victims, when we strive for his truth even to shedding blood; we burn the sweetest incense to him when we are aflame with holy and pious love in his sight; we consecrate and we return his gifts in us and our own person; by solemn feasts and dedicated days, we render sacred and proclaim the memory of his benefits, lest, by the passing of time ingrave forgetfulness might creep upon us; we sacrifice to him a victim of humility and of praise on the altar of our heart kindled by the fire of love (X.3).

For Augustine, the Eucharistic offering is an oblation. Yet, it is one that transforms the very nature of what it means to be human; our memories, our creative imagination, our works of justice and love toward God and neighbor—all of these are configured according to the Eucharistic pedagogy of the Church. It is a process, a way of formation, in which when we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the death of the Lord, until he comes in glory. Oblation is not about inflicting suffering and pain upon ourselves but that gradual formation into a life configured to Christ’s gift of self-love.
And dear friends, this is what the Church means by evangelization, the “gospelization” of all human existence. The liturgical life of the Church necessarily plays a part in this; but, as Sacrosanctum Concilium reminds us, “But in order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds be attuned to their voices, and that they cooperate with heavenly grace lest they receive it in vain” (no. 11).

Thus, fundamentally, this on-line journal is about teaching dispositions for performing this oblation necessary for evangelization. Indeed, it considers what one must know, and how one must know it, in order to participate fruitfully in the liturgical life of the Church; it also, considers spirituality—the type of habits, the eschatological imagination, developed through the practices of prayer in the Church. It considers culture, and how abiding within a very specific world, in a very specific time, shapes the way that we offer this oblation. It considers mystagogy, how chewing upon the signs of the liturgy might allow us to taste the mystery, and thus transform us.

The audience, then, we hope to speak to includes those involved in liturgical ministry but we hope not to limit it to this. We hope to address the catechist, striving to teach his or her student the importance of Eucharistic participation, to facilitate a formation in Eucharistic desire; We hope to address the deacon or priest, striving to give transformative homilies, but who would benefit from a formation into the mystagogical imagination of the Church; We hope to speak to the music minister, so that they might see their work not simply as “accompanying” Mass but cultivating a sense of the mystery of God through the words that are said, through the tune that is sung. We are thus a catechetical journal, a journal of spirituality, a journal of liturgy. And our
deepest hope is not only that we talk about these things but that through this reflection, we might (quoting St. Paul):

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”