

The Importance of People's Understanding of the Liturgy of the Catholic Church in the Border Areas of Indonesia and the State of Timor Leste

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the importance of people's understanding of the liturgy of the Catholic Church in the border area of Indonesia and Timor Leste. The research was carried out through a descriptive qualitative approach with interviews, observations, and documentation methods of parish priests, catechists, liturgical officers, and local faithful. The research process was carried out during a scheduled pastoral observation period in the border parish environment. The results of the study show that the level of understanding of the meaning and order of liturgical celebrations still varies, influenced by the background of faith education, liturgical guidance, and the local cultural context. These findings affirm the importance of contextually strengthening liturgical catechesis in order to increase the active participation of the faithful in the liturgical life of the Church in the border areas.

INTRODUCTION

The liturgy is the center of the life of the Catholic Church because through the liturgy the faithful participate in the mystery of salvation and live the faith concretely in daily life. In the tradition of the Church, the liturgy is understood as the culmination and source of the life of the faithful that unites personal faith experience with the communal celebration of faith within the Church community. According to *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Second Vatican Council, 1963), the liturgy is the “source and summit” of the life of the Church because through the liturgy the faithful participate actively in the mystery of salvation. In the Indonesian Catholic context, Martasudjita (2011) also explains that liturgy is not merely a ritual activity, but a celebration of faith that shapes the spirituality, awareness, and active participation of the faithful in the life of the Church. According to White (2020), the liturgy is not only a form of formal worship, but also a means of forming the spirituality of the faithful in their daily lives. Therefore, understanding the meaning and structure of the liturgy becomes an important factor in building active, conscious, and meaningful participation in the celebration of faith. In pastoral practices in various areas of the Church, the level of understanding of the liturgy among the faithful still shows significant variation because it is influenced by faith education, the process of catechesis, and the socio-cultural context of the local community (Johnson, 2021).

In the context of the Church in the border areas, the life of the faithful has a distinctive dynamic because it is influenced by different social, economic, and cultural conditions than the central pastoral area of the Church. Border areas often face limited access to systematic theological education and faith formation. In addition, the mobility of cross-border communities also affects the religious practices of the faithful in their daily lives. Anderson (2022) explains that Catholic communities in suburban areas tend to hold religious traditions strongly, but are not always followed by a deep theological understanding. In the Indonesian context, research on the life of Catholics in pastoral areas shows that the limitations of faith formation can affect the quality of the faithful’s participation in liturgical celebrations (Situmorang, 2022).

Several previous studies have highlighted the relationship between liturgical catechesis and the involvement of the faithful in the life of the Church. Brown (2021) shows that the faithful who understand the structure and symbols of the liturgy tend to have a more active participation in the celebration of the Eucharist. Liturgical understanding is also closely related to the ongoing process of faith formation in the Church community. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Catholic Church, 1994) affirms that liturgical celebrations, especially the Eucharist, are central to the spiritual life of the faithful because through the sacraments the faithful encounter Christ and deepen their communion with the Church. In pastoral studies, the liturgy is therefore understood not merely as a ritual obligation, but also as a means of faith education that enables the faithful to understand the meaning of the symbols, rites, and prayers used in the celebration of the Church. Other research confirms that structured faith education is able to increase the faithful’s awareness of the spiritual meaning of

liturgical celebrations so that the liturgy is not understood only as a religious obligation, but as a profound experience of faith (Garcia, 2023).

Although various studies have discussed liturgy and participation of the faithful, most of these studies have been conducted in urban areas or pastoral centers of the Church that have adequate faith education facilities. In the context of border areas, research on the understanding of the liturgy of the faithful is still relatively limited. In fact, according to Bevans (2021), pastoral theology needs to pay attention to the local social and cultural context because the faith experience of the faithful is always influenced by the reality of daily life. The same thing is also confirmed by research in Indonesia which shows that a contextual pastoral approach is very important to understand the faith practices of the faithful in various different social situations (Sugiyono, 2022).

Based on these conditions, this study seeks to examine more deeply the understanding of the faithful about the liturgy of the Catholic Church in the border area of Indonesia and Timor Leste. The focus of research is directed at how the faithful understand the meaning of the liturgy as well as the factors that influence that understanding in their pastoral lives. In addition, this research also aims to describe how the faithful live the liturgical celebration in the context of border socio-culture. Through a descriptive qualitative approach, this research seeks to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the experience of faith of the faithful in the liturgical life of the Church.

The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of pastoral theology studies, especially in contextual liturgical studies in border areas. Theoretically, this research can enrich the literature on the relationship between liturgical understanding and the participation of the faithful in the life of the Church. Practically, the findings of this study are expected to be the basis for the development of a more contextual and sustainable liturgical catechesis program. Thompson (2024) emphasized that effective liturgical coaching can increase the awareness of the faithful of the meaning of the faith celebrated in the liturgy, so that the participation of the faithful in the celebration of the Church becomes more active and meaningful.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Liturgy as the Center of Church Life

The faithful's understanding of the liturgy is inseparable from the process of catechesis and faith education that takes place in the life of the Church. Liturgical catechesis has an important role in helping the faithful understand the theological significance of each element in the liturgical celebration. In contemporary pastoral studies, Long (2021) emphasized that liturgy-oriented faith education is able to shape the awareness of the faithful about the relationship between the celebration of faith and daily life. Through liturgical catechesis, the faithful are invited to understand that each symbol and rite in the liturgy has a deep spiritual meaning.

In addition, pastoral research shows that sustained faith formation contributes to improving the quality of the participation of the faithful in the liturgy. Research conducted by Collins (2022) found that parish communities that have a systematic liturgical catechesis program tend to have a higher level of participation of the faithful in the celebration of the Eucharist. This shows that the faithful's understanding of the liturgy does not arise automatically, but requires a continuous process of faith formation through structured pastoral education.

Liturgical Catechesis and Faith Building of the People

The faithful's understanding of the liturgy is also greatly influenced by the social and cultural context in which the faithful live. In the perspective of contextual theology, the liturgy is seen as a practice of faith that is always in contact with the social and cultural realities of society. Schreiter (2021) explains that liturgical inculturation is an important process in the life of the Church because it allows the message of faith to be translated in the language of the local culture without losing its theological meaning. Thus, the liturgy not only becomes a celebration of the universal faith, but can also be lived contextually by the local community. In the context of Asian society, cultural diversity has a strong influence on the way the faithful live the liturgy. Research conducted by Phan (2023) shows that liturgical practices in the Asian region are often influenced by local cultural traditions that shape the way the faithful understand religious symbols. Therefore, a pastoral approach that is sensitive to the cultural context is very important so that the liturgy can be understood and lived more deeply by the faithful.

Liturgy in Social and Cultural Contexts

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Pastoral Dynamics in Border Areas

Border areas are social spaces that have special characteristics in the lives of the faithful, including in religious practices. Communities living in border areas often face limited access to education, pastoral services, and faith-building facilities. According to Donnan and Wilson (2020), border areas have unique social dynamics because the faithful in the region often experience complex cultural and identity interactions. This condition can affect religious practices and the way the faithful understand religious symbols. In the context of the Catholic Church, research on faith communities in the periphery suggests that pastoral ministry in the border areas requires a more contextual and participatory approach. Research conducted by Ward (2022) shows that Church communities in peripheral areas often rely on local religious traditions in living their faith. This suggests that the understanding of the liturgy of the faithful in the border areas needs to be studied specifically to understand how the liturgy is lived in the context of social life that is different from that of urban areas.

METHODOLOGY

Types and Approaches to Research

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design that aims to deeply understand the phenomenon of the faithful's understanding of the liturgy of the Catholic Church in the context of pastoral life in the border area of Indonesia and Timor Leste. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research seeks to explore the experience, meaning, and practice of faith of the faithful in the liturgical life of the Church in a contextual manner. In social research and pastoral theology, a qualitative approach allows researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the social and religious realities experienced by the research participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). In addition, this approach is also relevant for exploring dimensions of spiritual meaning and experience that cannot be quantitatively measured. Flick (2022) asserts that qualitative research is very effective for examining religious phenomena in certain social contexts because it is able to describe the subjective experiences of individuals in depth.

The research design used is descriptive-qualitative, which aims to systematically describe the phenomenon of the faithful's understanding of the liturgy and the factors that influence this understanding in the pastoral life of the faithful. This design allows researchers to analyze participants' experiences, views, and religious practices in depth through a contextual data interpretation process. This approach is widely used in pastoral theological research because it is able to provide an empirical picture of the faith life of the faithful in the Church community (Swinton & Mowat, 2020).

Population, Informants, and Sampling Techniques

The population in this study is Catholics living in the border areas of Indonesia and Timor Leste, especially those who are active in the pastoral life of the parish. Considering that this study uses a qualitative approach, the sampling technique used is purposive sampling, which is a deliberate selection technique of informants based on certain criteria that are relevant to the purpose of the research. This technique is used to select informants who have direct experience in the liturgical life of the Church so as to be able to provide in-depth information on the research topic (Palinkas et al., 2020).

The number of informants in this study was eleven people, which consisted of several categories of participants representing the structure of pastoral life in the parishes of the border region. The informants included one parish priest, two parish catechists, three liturgical officers (lectors, psalmists, and choir members), as well as five Catholics who actively participated in liturgical celebrations in the parish. The selection of these informants is based on their role in the liturgical life of the Church and is expected to provide a comprehensive perspective on the faithful's understanding of the liturgy. In qualitative research, a relatively small number of informants can still produce in-depth data if informants are selected appropriately and relevant to the research focus (Guest et al., 2020).

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection in this study was carried out through several main techniques, namely in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. In-depth interview techniques are used to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences and views of informants regarding liturgical understanding in the life of the Church. Interviews are conducted in a semi-structured manner using pre-arranged interview guidelines. This method allows researchers to explore the informant's views more flexibly and in-depth according to the context of their experience (Rubin & Rubin, 2021).

In addition to interviews, this study also used participatory observation techniques to directly observe the practice of liturgical celebration in border parishes. Observations were made during several liturgical celebrations, including the weekly Eucharistic celebration and other liturgical activities involving the participation of the faithful. Observation allows researchers to understand how the faithful are involved in the celebration of the liturgy as well as how the practice of liturgy is lived in the life of the Church community (Angrosino, 2020). Documentation techniques are also used to complement research data through the collection of parish pastoral documents, records of liturgical activities, and archives related to the development of the faith of the faithful.

Research Implementation Procedure

This research was carried out through several systematic stages. The first stage is the research preparation stage which includes literature study, preparation of research instruments, and management of research permits to parishes and related pastoral institutions. The second stage is the data collection stage which is carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation in the parish environment of the border area. The third stage is the stage of data processing and analysis which is carried out in stages through the process of coding, categorization, and data interpretation. The last stage is the stage of drawing conclusions and preparing a research report that contains the main findings and pastoral implications of this research. According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), systematic qualitative research procedures are essential to ensure the validity and credibility of research findings.

Analysis Techniques

The data analysis in this study uses an interactive analysis model consisting of three main stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selects and simplifies the data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation so that it focuses on information relevant to the research objectives. Furthermore, the data that has been reduced is presented in the form of descriptive narratives and thematic categories to facilitate the interpretation process. The last stage is the drawing of conclusions made through the interpretation of data based on the patterns of findings that emerged during the analysis process (Miles et al., 2020).

To support the data analysis process, the researcher uses NVivo software as a tool in qualitative data management and coding. The use of this software allows researchers to organize data systematically and facilitate the process of thematic analysis of the results of interviews and observations. According to Silver and Lewins (2022), the use of qualitative analysis software can increase transparency and consistency in the qualitative research data analysis process.

RESEARCH RESULT

Variations in the Faithful's Understanding of the Meaning of the Liturgy

The results of the study show that the understanding of the Catholic Church's liturgy in the border areas of Indonesia and Timor Leste is still at a diverse level. Based on the results of in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and parish pastoral documentation, it was found that some faithful have understood the liturgy as a celebration of faith that presents an encounter with God and the community of the Church. However, some other faithful still understand the liturgy as limited to the obligation to attend mass without understanding the structure, symbols, and theological meaning of the rite celebrated. Observational findings show that the faithful are quite active in physical presence, but not all of them show deep inner involvement, for example in answering liturgical passages or consciously following the flow of the celebration. The documentation of parish formation also shows that liturgical catechesis activities have not been carried out regularly and thoroughly, so that

the understanding of the faithful develops unevenly. Thus, the results of this study confirm that the main problem does not lie in the lack of presence of the faithful in the liturgy, but in their uneven understanding of the essence of the liturgy itself.

Some of the informant's expressions that strengthen the findings are as follows. The parish priest stated: "*Judging from the attendance, these faithful are actually very faithful to come to Mass. But when asked further about the meaning of the parts of the mass, there were still many who answered incorrectly. So they were present, but not everyone understood why it was celebrated like that.*" (P-1, January 12, 2025). Furthermore, a catechist revealed: "*Many faithful know that the Mass is important, but sometimes they cannot explain why there is a rite of repentance, why there is a liturgy of the word, and why the Eucharist is the center. So the understanding is still very common.*" (K-1, January 15, 2025). A parishioner also said: "*I used to attend mass, but honestly I thought the important thing was to come, sit down, listen to the Father, and then go home. Only later did I begin to understand that each part has a meaning.*" (U-2, January 19, 2025).

Based on all these data, it can be understood that the variation in the understanding of the faithful is a clear picture of the uneven process of internalizing the meaning of the liturgy in the life of the local Church. The high presence of the faithful does indicate a strong loyalty to the faith, but this loyalty is not fully accompanied by an adequate theological and liturgical understanding. This situation shows the need to distinguish between habitual participation and participation born of conscious appreciation. Therefore, the findings on this theme are an important basis to see that liturgical formation should not stop at the invitation to attend, but should be directed at deepening the meaning so that the faithful are able to celebrate the liturgy more fully, actively, and reflectively.

Liturgical Understanding Affects the Quality of Congregational Participation

The findings of the study show that the level of understanding of the liturgy of the faithful is directly related to the quality of their participation in the celebration of the Church. From the results of participatory observation during several weekly Eucharistic celebrations, it appears that faithful who have a better understanding tend to follow the celebration more consciously, orderly, and actively. They are not only physically present, but also involved in liturgical answers, chanting, body posture, and prayer appreciation. On the other hand, faithful whose understanding is still limited tend to follow the Mass passively, waiting only for certain parts without being aware of the overall dynamics of the liturgy. This finding is also reinforced by the results of interviews with liturgical officers who see that the activeness of the faithful is greatly influenced by the extent to which they understand the reason and meaning of the liturgical actions performed. Thus, this study shows that liturgical understanding is not only cognitive knowledge, but also the foundation for active, conscious, and meaningful participation in the liturgical life of the Church.

Confirmation of these findings can be seen in the following excerpts of the interview. A liturgical officer explained: *"If the faithful already understand, they usually attend the Mass more lively. They answered prayers steadily, sang earnestly, and seemed more prepared from start to finish."* (L-1, January 14, 2025). One catechist added: *"Understanding is very influential. Faithful who understand usually don't get bored quickly, because they know what is being celebrated. But if you don't understand, mass is often considered just a Sunday routine."* (K-2, January 18, 2025). A congregant expressed the same thing: *"After I participated in the liturgical formation in the ward, I think the Mass became different. I used to be just casual, but now I'm more focused because I know the parts are interconnected."* (U-4, January 23, 2025).

These findings show that the quality of the participation of the faithful is inseparable from the quality of their understanding of the liturgy itself. Lively participation turns out to be born not solely from habits or emotional drives, but from awareness of the meaning that is being celebrated. In this context, the understanding of the liturgy becomes a formative element that shapes the inner attitude of the faithful in the celebration of the Church. Therefore, the better the understanding of the faithful, the greater the possibility of growing active, conscious, and appreciative participation. Thus, efforts to improve the quality of the liturgy at the parish level need to be directed not only at a neat implementation, but also at faith education that makes the faithful appreciate all celebrations in an integral way.

The Background of Faith Education and Catechesis Becomes a Determining Factor

The results of the study show that the background of faith education and the intensity of liturgical catechesis are very decisive factors in shaping the understanding of the faithful towards the liturgy. From the results of the interviews, it was found that faithful who had participated in faith formation, Bible study, or liturgical officer training tended to have a better understanding of the structure and meaning of the liturgy. On the other hand, faithful who rarely receive pastoral assistance tend to understand the liturgy in a limited way to aspects of customs and traditions. Parish documentation data also shows that liturgical guidance has not been carried out in a scheduled and tiered manner for all groups of faithful. On the other hand, observations show that liturgical officers who have been trained are better able to carry out their duties in an orderly manner and are aware of their ministry function in the liturgy. This shows that the quality of liturgical understanding does not arise automatically from the habit of attending Mass, but is formed through a planned, continuous, and contextual process of faith formation.

The findings were confirmed through the statements of the informants. The parish priest said: *"Those who often participate in coaching or are involved in the ministry usually understand more quickly. They know why the movements in the mass are important. The problem is, not all faithful get the same coaching opportunities."* (P-1, January 21, 2025). A liturgical officer said: *"I myself have only just begun to understand when I attend lector training. Before, I only knew the task of reading, but after being coached, I realized that the ministry was part of the whole celebration, not standing alone."* (L-2, January 17, 2025). One of the congregation said: *"If there is no*

explanation from the catechist or the priest, sometimes we just go along as usual. So we need to be helped to understand better." (U-1, January 11, 2025).

Thus, faith education and liturgical catechesis can be understood as a very important mediating factor between the presence of the faithful in the celebration and the depth of their appreciation of the meaning of the liturgy. These findings show that faithful who receive more intensive guidance show better development of understanding than those who rely solely on regular liturgical experience. That is, directed coaching serves as a bridge that transforms ritual experiences into reflective experiences of faith. Therefore, the Church in the border region needs to place liturgical catechesis as a continuous process of faith education, not as an incidental activity that is carried out only at certain moments.

Local Cultural Context and Border Life Influence Liturgical Understanding

The study also found that the context of local culture and the realities of life in border areas have a real influence on the way the faithful understand and live the liturgy. In the life of border communities, communal traditions, kinship relationships, the use of local languages, and cross-territorial mobility shape the way the faithful participate in the Church. Observations show that the atmosphere of togetherness of the faithful in the liturgy is very strong, but in some cases the meaning of the liturgy is still more accepted through social customs than through deep theological understanding. In addition, the use of liturgical terms that are considered abstract by some faithful makes the process of understanding not always easy. The results of the interviews also showed that some faithful understood the liturgy more quickly when explanations were delivered in a language that was close to their life experiences. Therefore, these findings confirm that the liturgy in the border region cannot be separated from the local cultural context, so the pastoral approach used also needs to be sensitive to the language, symbols, and ways of thinking of the faithful in the area.

This is evident in a number of informant statements. One catechist explained: *"If the liturgical explanation is presented too theoretical, it is difficult for the faithful to grasp. But if it is explained using examples of daily life or using language that they are used to hearing, they understand faster."* (K-1, January 24, 2025). A devotee revealed: *"Sometimes we join because since we were children, we follow our parents, we follow the village. But when it was explained slowly in a language close to us, it was felt that the mass was not just a habit."* (U-3, January 20, 2025). The choir officer also stated: *"The culture of togetherness here is very strong, so the faithful are happy to be involved. It's just that sometimes the spirit is not always the same as understanding. The faithful sing along, they join in the ministry, but they don't necessarily know the meaning of the whole celebration."* (L-3, January 26, 2025).

These findings confirm that liturgical understanding in border areas must be read in a concrete cultural horizon, not in a normative framework detached from the lives of the faithful. The social reality of border communities shows that faith and culture interact closely with each other, so the process of liturgical formation must respect the way in which the faithful receive, interpret, and live the symbols of faith. If the language and approach used are too far removed from the daily experience of the faithful, then the liturgy is easy to understand only as a communal custom. Conversely, when the liturgy is explained contextually, it is easier for the faithful to grasp its meaning in depth. Therefore, sensitivity to local culture is an important requirement for the success of pastoral assistance in border areas.

The Role of Priests, Catechists, and Liturgical Officers Is Crucial in Shaping the Understanding of the Faithful

The results of the study show that the understanding of the faithful about the liturgy is greatly influenced by the quality of assistance from parish priests, catechists, and liturgical officers. From the results of the interviews, it appears that these pastoral figures not only function as executors, but also as mediators of the understanding of faith among the faithful. In some observed pastoral activities, brief explanations before or after the celebration have been shown to help the faithful understand the meaning of certain passages in the liturgy. Documentation of parish activities also shows that when coaching is carried out by pastoral ministers consistently, the response of the faithful tends to be more positive and open. However, this study also found that this role has not been running optimally due to limited time, energy, and the absence of a more systematic coaching program. Thus, the improvement of the liturgical understanding of the faithful cannot be separated from the strengthening of the capacity of pastoral ministers as close, communicative, and contextual fosters of faith.

This finding is confirmed by the expressions of the following informants. The parish priest said: *"The faithful really want to learn, as long as they are accompanied continuously. Sometimes they are embarrassed to ask, so we have to be more active in explaining, not waiting for them to come first."* (P-1, January 28, 2025). One catechist said: *"If we only teach when there is a sacrament preparation, it is not enough. The faithful need regular assistance, including liturgy, so that they not only know the practice, but also understand its meaning."* (K-2, January 22, 2025). One parishioner added: *"If the priest or catechist gives a brief explanation before mass or at the time of a ward meeting, we will understand it more easily. Sometimes it's not because the material is difficult, but because it's never been explained simply."* (U-5, January 27, 2025).

From these findings, it appears that pastoral ministers hold a strategic position in bridging the Church's liturgical teaching with the concrete experiences of the faithful on the ground. Their presence is not only important in leading and organizing the course of the celebrations, but also in helping the faithful interpret the meaning of the faith that is being celebrated. When priests, catechists, and liturgical officers perform educational functions consistently, the faithful show greater openness to learn and engage more consciously. On the other hand, if pastoral assistance is limited, the understanding of the faithful tends to develop partially. Therefore, the improvement of the quality of liturgical life of the faithful depends heavily on the ability of pastoral ministers to be present as communicative, patient, and contextual guides of the faith.

Strengthening Contextual Liturgical Catechesis Becomes an Urgent Pastoral Need

The final findings of this study confirm that the strengthening of contextual liturgical catechesis is an urgent pastoral need in the border areas of Indonesia and Timor Leste. Based on the integration of the results of interviews, observations, and documentation, it can be seen that the faithful have a good enthusiasm for the liturgical life of the Church, but this enthusiasm has not been fully supported by a deep understanding. This condition shows that the Church needs to move from a pattern of service that is only oriented to the implementation of rites to assistance that helps the faithful understand the meaning of the faith that is celebrated. The liturgical catechesis in question is not only a theoretical explanation, but a guidance that is close to the reality of the faithful, using simple language, concrete examples, and is carried out regularly. The researcher's observations during liturgical activities also show that when the faithful are given simple and relevant explanations, they are more likely to understand and show more conscious participation. Therefore, the results of this study confirm that the strengthening of contextual liturgical catechesis is not just an additional program, but an integral part of the Church's pastoral strategy in the border region.

The following interview excerpts show this need in real terms. A congregant said: *"If there is a coaching that discusses mass in simple language, we are happy to participate. You see, we also want to understand, not just come and go home."* (U-2, January 16, 2025). A liturgical officer revealed: *"I think that the formation is not just for the officers. The ordinary faithful are also necessary, because the liturgy belongs to the whole Church, not just the people who are in front of the altar."* (L-1, January 25, 2025). One catechist affirmed: *"This border region needs a more contextual way of assistance. The faithful here have a good spirit of faith, they just need to be helped to understand more and be more involved consciously."* (K-1, January 29, 2025).

This paragraph makes it clear that the need for contextual liturgical catechesis is born directly from the pastoral realities facing the faithful, not merely from theoretical considerations. The faithful have shown a readiness to grow in the understanding of the faith, but that growth requires a pattern of mentoring that is appropriate to the social, cultural, and linguistic situation in which they live. In other words, an effective pastoral strategy in the border region must be able to translate the Church's liturgical teachings into a form of close, communicative, and continuous formation. If this is done seriously, then the liturgy is no longer understood only as a religious obligation, but as a source of faith renewal that is truly lived by the faithful. Therefore, the strengthening of contextual liturgical catechesis should be placed as a top priority in the Church's ministry in border areas.

DISCUSSION

The main findings of this study show that the most fundamental problem in the liturgical life of the faithful in the border areas does not lie in the low attendance at the celebrations, but in the unequal level of understanding of the meaning of the liturgy. This condition is in line with Pope Francis' affirmation that the liturgy demands "formation for the liturgy" as well as "formation by the liturgy," so that the participation of the faithful is not sufficiently understood as physical presence, but as conscious involvement in the celebrated mysteries (Francis, 2022). In the same framework, Buttigieg (2023) assesses that an authentic liturgy is always pastoral because it connects the concrete life story of the faithful with the story of salvation celebrated by the Church. Thus, the variation of understanding found in this study shows that some faithful have indeed entered into the liturgical experience as a space of encounter with God, while others still stop at the level of rituals and customs. Theoretically, these results reaffirm that the quality of the liturgical life of the faithful is highly determined by the Church's ability to help the faithful move from outward participation to complete inner appreciation.

The finding that liturgical understanding has a direct effect on the quality of participation of the faithful also has an important significance for the development of pastoral theology. Seper (2023) explains that liturgical coaching is ineffective if it stops only at intellectual explanations, because the liturgy must be learned through experience accompanied by reflection. In line with that, O'Malley (2020) emphasizes that a good liturgical catechesis is not just about "explaining the ceremony," but shaping the disposition of prayer, bodily habits, and a liturgical way of life. In the context of the results of this study, faithful who understood the relationship between the parts of the Mass, symbols, and ritual actions were shown to be more active in liturgical responses, chanting, and body postures, while faithful who understood less tended to follow the Mass passively.

This means that active participation should not be reduced to merely external involvement, but rather should be understood as the result of pastoral formation that helps the faithful understand what they are celebrating and why they are celebrating it. These results broaden the practical understanding that the improvement of liturgical quality in border parishes must be built on continuous faith education, not just on the technical arrangement of celebrations. Subali (2024) similarly argues that participation in the Eucharist should lead the faithful toward deeper spiritual awareness and concrete expressions of faith in everyday life. Therefore, liturgical catechesis should not only aim to improve ritual participation, but also to form the spiritual consciousness of the faithful so that the liturgy becomes a transformative experience that shapes Christian life in a more meaningful and contextual manner.

The factors of faith education, catechesis coaching, and the quality of pastoral assistance proved to be very decisive variables in this study. Dell and Cottrell-Boyce (2024), when discussing the meaning of active participation, show that liturgical participation is easily misunderstood if it is not accompanied by clear guidance on the meaning of the faithful's involvement. On the other hand, this study shows that training for lectors, psalmists, choir members, and congregational companions results in a better understanding of their respective functions in celebration. These results support the argument that pastoral ministers are not just the executors of rites, but agents of formation who help the faithful correctly interpret liturgical acts. However, there is also a factor that is slightly contrary to the initial assumption, namely that the high attendance of the faithful is not always directly proportional to the depth of understanding. This difference can be explained logically because strong religious habits can indeed sustain the loyalty of presence, but without systematic coaching they do not necessarily develop into mature theological and liturgical awareness.

Aspects of the local cultural context and social reality of border areas also contribute greatly in explaining the results of this study. López Rubio (2024) points out that liturgical renewal becomes more meaningful when local language, music, and cultural expressions are appropriately integrated into the celebration, as it is easier for the faithful to grasp the meaning of faith through symbols that are close to their life experiences. This perspective is relevant to the study's findings that border faithful understand the liturgy more easily when explanations are given in simple language, concrete examples, and references to everyday experiences. On a broader level, ten Kate and van den Hemel (2020) affirm that border areas are social spaces shaped by identities, mobility, and community imaginations that are fluid and strong; therefore, religious practices in such areas cannot be separated from the distinctive socio-cultural dynamics. Consequently, pastoral theology in border areas does not sufficiently adopt a uniform approach from the center, but needs to be developed as a contextual pastoral that is sensitive to local languages, kinship relationships, communal lifestyles, and cross-border experiences. At this point, this research contributes to the development of the science of pastoral theology by affirming that a deeply understood liturgy always grows through a dialogue between the universal tradition of the Church and the living reality of the local faithful

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Church in the border areas of Indonesia and Timor Leste is still at a diverse level and is influenced by various factors, especially faith education, the intensity of liturgical catechesis, and the local cultural context that shapes the way the faithful live the faith. The findings of the study confirm that the presence of the faithful in liturgical celebrations is not always in line with the depth of understanding of the theological meaning of the rites celebrated. Therefore, the strengthening of a contextual, sustainable, and communicative liturgical catechesis is essential to help the faithful understand the relationship between liturgical celebration and the daily life of faith. In practical terms, this study recommends that the Church in the border regions develop a more systematic liturgical formation program through collaboration between parish priests, catechists, and liturgical officers so that the faithful are not only present in the liturgical celebration, but also able to participate actively, consciously, and appreciatively in the liturgical life of the Church.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This study has limitations in the relatively limited number of informants as well as the focus of research that covers only one pastoral context in the border area. Therefore, further research is recommended to expand the scope of research sites in several other border parishes and combine qualitative approaches with quantitative methods to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the level of liturgical understanding among the faithful in various pastoral contexts. Future studies are also encouraged to explore more deeply the role of contextual liturgical catechesis, Eucharistic spirituality, and pastoral accompaniment in strengthening the active participation of the faithful in the liturgical life of the Church. In addition, further research may integrate Catholic liturgical perspectives from official Church documents such as *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and contemporary Catholic pastoral theology in order to enrich the theological foundation of liturgical studies in border communities.

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