

### **How important is RITE to our salvation?**

Use of all capital letters indicates your awareness of "rite" as differentiated from "Rite". Further, there is a suggestion that neither really addresses the concept of the vehicle of our salvation: "Church".

The word "rite" in lower case pertains to ritual, particularly the external manifestation of a spiritual reality. This may refer to the way we perform a baptism, wedding, funeral, Divine Liturgy or any other service. It may also be the rite of blessing food, water, flowers, a grave site or a car or home.

Underlying any external action may be found deeper understanding of the meaning behind what is just seen. That may lend itself to the use of "Rite" [upper case] as an indication of a rationale for what is done. For centuries this latter meaning has been used to refer to groups of like-believing Christians who worship in a particular manner. We may speak of ritual families--Byzantine, Syriac, Latin or whatever. These include development of earliest Christians' adaptation of familiar temple worship from which they came. Subsequent expressions grew into Antiochian, Byzantine, Syrian and other "ritual" churches developing in the eastern sectors of the then Roman Empire. As well there were parts of Africa and Asia not united to the Roman Empire that imparted other elements to the Church's "Eastern" thought. When Christians began to be drawn from non-Jewish populations, there were obvious changes in the tenor of the worship. "Rite" had become a handy term to use to indicate a particular Church. This is imprecise and inadequate, for the fullness of the Church became mistakenly understood as "The Roman Catholic Church as celebrated in a variety of externally diverse liturgical manners."

Close scrutiny of the assembled Fathers of the Church at the Second Vatican Council realized the erroneous thinking and decreed that each Church of the Church is equal to any and every other--irrespective of any consideration of such factors of place(s) or number of people enrolled.

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Church" and not "Rites of the Church," new phraseology and slightly altered concepts had to be taught by the bishops, and learned by the rest of us.

This has perhaps been the impetus for using all upper case letters in "RITE" in your question.

The "rite" employed in any liturgical function should be in conformity with the principles and regulations of a particular liturgical family (or "Rite") of the Church. It is clearly within the world-wide scope of our Church that people of diverse cultures express themselves in specific ways, using prayers, gestures, understanding and meanings to bring people to salvation through fidelity to a complex system of soul-touching behaviors, developed from the earliest days of Christian evangelization among the whole of humanity to whom the Apostles were sent to "Baptize in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."

Rather than RITE in all capital letters, it may be more appropriate to consider using the word "Church." So, the question becomes "How important is 'Church' to our salvation? It is paramount.

Rite and ritual are not entities unto themselves, but ways and means toward extracting from the Church all that it has to offer us in our quest for salvation. It is also important to remember that in keeping all the time-honored intricacies of our Church's system of theology, spirituality and psyche, we are not mere slaves to some exotic exhibition, but participators in a long line of succession from those who have gone before us. This makes us part of "the Communion of Saints"--past, present and future. We are united to the Apostles, the great numbers of holy men and women who have been nourished by the same Gospel, preaching, and outlook on existence as has formed this ritual family ("Church", if you prefer) that we perpetuate. We are connected with the one, holy catholic and apostolic Church.

(taken from "Ask Fr. Denny", articles published by the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of St. Nicholas in Chicago and reprinted here with permission from Fr. Dennis Molitvy)

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