



OFFICE FOR THE LITURGICAL CELEBRATIONS
OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF

**CELEBRATING THE SOLEMNITY
OF THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF THE LORD**

First International Gathering on Eucharistic Adoration

Rome, 21 June 2011

When the title of this presentation was given to me, I immediately thought back to a famous homily given by Benedict XVI in 2008, for the celebration of the Solemnity of Corpus Christi in Rome.

I shall deal with three great truths connected with the celebration of Corpus Christi, at the same time seeking to draw out some important implications which particularly affect our liturgical life.

Standing in the Presence of the Lord

In the ancient Church, “standing in the presence of the Lord” was expressed by the term “*statio*.” Let us try to understand something more of the weighty significance of this term.

When Christianity spread beyond the confines of the Jewish world, the Apostles and their immediate successors had one overriding concern: that in every city there would be only one bishop and one altar. Why such a concern? The unicity of the bishop and altar was to give expression to the unity of the Church, beyond the many differences, present in those who became members of the Church by virtue of Baptism.

In the unity thus expressed, we find the most profound sense of the Eucharist: by receiving the one Bread, we become a living organism – the one Body of the Lord. And thus the Apostle Paul could exclaim: “Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all” (Col 3:11).

Participation in the Eucharist implied, however, that one would find together people coming together from very different situations: man and woman, rich and poor, nobleman and slave, intellectual and ignorant one, the ascetic and the sinner converted from a dissolute life. Access to the Eucharistic celebration became, also visibly, entrance into the one Body of the Lord, the Church.

Somewhat later, when the number of Christians began to increase, it was not possible to maintain this external form, expressive of the Church’s unity. At Rome, titular churches were

erected; in time, they evolved into the parishes. In this new context, it was necessary to give a new form to express the visible unity that existed earlier. And that happened with the institution of the *statio* (stational church). The Pope as Bishop of Rome, especially during Lent, celebrated the Sacred Liturgy in the various titular churches, where all the Christians of the City gathered. In this way, even if in a new way, the experience of the former time was renewed: all those joined by the same faith found themselves together, in the same place, in the presence of the Lord.

The feast of Corpus Christi retrieves that original intent. This feast is actually presented as the *statio urbis* (station of the City). The doors of the churches, parishes, groups of our dioceses open and all find themselves together in the presence of the Lord to be one with Him, the source of their unity. Thus, it is He, the Lord present in the Most Holy Eucharist, Who makes us one Body and makes it possible that the multitude come together in the unity of the Church.

Entering into the “We” of the Church

The celebration of Corpus Christi, then, teaches us every time to enter into the “we” of the Church at prayer. This “we” speaks to us of a reality, which is the Church, which goes beyond individuals, communities and groups. This “we” reminds us that the Church, even when present in a local or particular dimension, is always universal; it reaches all times and places, and crosses the threshold of time to allow us to enter into eternity; she safeguards and transmits the mystery of Christ, the ultimate and definitive answer to the question of meaning present in the heart of every man.

It follows, then, that in celebrating Corpus Christi, we are recalled to some typical and undeniable dimensions of the liturgy. Above all, I am referring to the dimension of catholicity, which is constitutive of the Church from the very beginning. In that quality of catholicity, unity and diversity come together in such harmony as to form one substantially unified reality, albeit in a legitimate diversity of forms. And then comes the dimension of historical continuity, in virtue of that auspicious development appears to be that of a living organism which does not deny its own past, even while passing through the present and orienting itself toward the future. And then, the dimension of participation in the liturgy of Heaven, for which it is now more than ever appropriate to speak of the liturgy of the Church as that human and spiritual space in which Heaven manifests itself on earth. One need only think of an example of this coming from the First Eucharistic Prayer: “command that these gifts be borne by the hands of your holy Angel to your altar on high. . . .”

And, finally, the dimension of the “non-arbitrary,” which avoids consigning to the subjectivity of an individual or group that which belongs to all as a treasure received – to be safeguarded and transmitted. The liturgy is not some sort of entertainment, where each person can think he has the right to remove and add according to his own taste and his own greater or lesser happy inventive capacity. The liturgy is not a feast in which one always has to find something new to hold the interest of the participants. The liturgy is the celebration of the mystery of Christ, given to the Church, in which we are called to enter with always greater intensity, also in virtue of the ever-new and providential repetitiousness of the rite.

Entering into the “we” of the Church beginning with the Eucharist signifies also letting oneself be transformed into the logic of that catholicity which is charity, which is openness of the heart, according to the measure of the Heart of Christ: it embraces everyone, bends its own ego to the exigencies of true love, is ready to give its own life without reservations. The

Eucharist is the true source of the charity of the Church and in the heart of everyone. From the Eucharist our daily life of charity takes form, that is the evangelical style of life to which we are all called.

Song and Language

Recently the Holy Father, in a letter written on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music, returned to the theme of the universality of language, because it pertains to sacred music.

The celebration of “Corpus Christi,” in its being the root and expression of catholicity, calls our attention to the universality of the music proper to the liturgy and to the necessity of being educated and of educating in that sense.

Thus Pope Benedict XVI writes:

Sometimes, in fact, these elements that are found in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, such as, precisely, the value of the great ecclesial patrimony of sacred music or the universality that is characteristic of Gregorian chant, have been held to express a concept which corresponds with a past that needs to be superseded and set aside because it is supposed to limit the freedom and creativity of the individual and of communities. Yet we must always ask ourselves anew: who or what is the authentic subject of the liturgy? The answer is simple: the Church. It is not the individual person or group which is celebrating the liturgy, but is first and foremost God’s action through the Church which has her own history, her rich tradition and her creativity.

The liturgy, and consequently sacred music, “lives on a correct and constant relationship between healthy *traditio* and *legitima progressio*,” keeping constantly in mind the fact that these two concepts – which the Council Fathers clearly underlined – merge since “tradition is a living reality, which therefore includes in itself the principle of development, of progress.”

Universality, that is typical of Gregorian Chant, is constantly recalled by the Magisterium, among the notes characterizing the musical expression that wants justly to be considered sacred and liturgical. In this universality we are able to understand the vital relationship between liturgical music and the mystery being celebrated. Concerning that mystery, which is universal because it is destined for all, music cannot be anything but a faithful interpreter and exegesis. Music or song that would only be an expression of subjectivity, or superficial and fleeting emotion, or of the current fashion would be too poor to have a place in the liturgy. In the liturgy, in fact, all must remain in a listening mode and participate in a universal language and, consequently, in music and song that open hearts to the mystery of the Lord.

Music and song in the liturgy must maintain a privileged reference to the Word of God and to that word which the great spiritual tradition has handed down to us, as an echo and interpretation of the mystery of Christ. Only thus do music and song remain faithful to their innate vocation as the means of access to the Christian reality which is life-saving.

The celebration of “Corpus Christi,” the “*statio urbis*” sign of the universality of the Church gathers together around the Eucharistic Mystery, is a reminder also not to forget the element of catholicity that always must make itself present in liturgical music.

Walking toward the Lord and with the Lord

Standing in the presence of the Lord has brought about, from the very beginning, walking toward the Lord and with the Lord.

This “walking toward,” this proceeding become procession can be better understood if we remember the experience of Israel, when the Israelites wandered for a long time across the desert. The ancient people of God was able to find a land and was successful in surviving even when losing the land because it did not live on bread alone but was nourished by the Word of the Lord. This “Word” was the strength that sustained an arduous and tiring journey that reinvigorated the Israelites in desolation and trial, and that imbued them with courage when every human effort to cling to hope seemed to fail.

The experience of ancient Israel is a sign and a permanent reference for the life of the Church and for each one of us. If we are able to carry the load of a pilgrimage across the spectrum of history and its contradictions, we owe it to the fact that we walk toward the Lord and that, on the walk, He is with us.

In this way, the feast of Corpus Christi signifies walking toward the Lord and with the Lord and, consequently, celebrating the authentic sense of life: this act of walking is not wandering aimlessly without a goal in the solitude of spaces without boundaries. The life of man has a very precise direction. The direction is Christ, the Lord of time and history, the Savior of all; and while we proceed in this direction, He, Who is the goal, is also the faithful companion along the road, the one who sustains our pilgrimage. “Bone pastor, panis vere, / Jesu, nostri miserere: / Tu nos pasce, nos tuere: / Tu nos bona fac videre / In terra viventium,” sings the Sequence for the liturgical Solemnity of Corpus Christi (Jesu, shepherd of the sheep: / Thou thy flock in safety keep, / Living bread, thy life supply: / Strengthen us, or else we die, / Fill us with celestial grace.).

That which the Christian community lives by celebrating Corpus Christi does not live alone. It lives this experience of Corpus Christi through all of us: through those who remain outside of the Church, who have left the Church, or who have never even known her. The public processing of Christians through the streets of the City of Man toward the Lord and with the Lord is the visible witness of a new way of understanding life and history, a new way that has been given to us through grace and that must be transmitted to all. It is the new way of hope that flows from faith in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God, Who becomes the Eucharist, Who shows us the way to take, accompanying the steps of our journey.

The Orientation of the Cosmos and History toward Christ

The celebration of Corpus Christi helps us, therefore, to find again an orientation of everything toward Christ, because everything has been thought of and made “through Him and for Him” (Col 1:16).

Our personal artistic knowledge, together with very serious recent studies, remind us that one of the typical characteristics of the Christian liturgy, from the beginning, was that of celebrating facing East.

Already in the term “turned toward the east,” there exists the entire significance of how the Christians, gathered together for the celebration of the divine mysteries, turned east in prayer. The churches were constructed facing east, because from there the sun rises (cosmic symbol of the coming of the Lord), a remembrance evermore expressive of the Sun of life, the Risen One. Christians at prayer turned their face toward the rising sun and thus oriented their heart

to the Lord of history, beginning and end of creation.

When, in the course of time, it was no longer possible, for different reasons, to construct churches with an eastern orientation, a substitute was a large crucifix on the altar or in the apse – richly decorated and featuring pictures the image of the Savior. Thus, despite the absence of the eastern orientation of the actual churches, the orientation of prayer remained very clear, to which the gathered assembly was invited during the liturgical celebration.

Unfortunately, in our times, we run the risk of losing the orientation of prayer, with the consequences of running the risk of losing the orientation of life and of history. The recuperation of the centrality of the cross, as the Holy Father Benedict XVI invites us to do with the example of the liturgy over which he presides, is not a marginal detail. In fact, it deals with an essential element of the liturgical action, of a sign that leads one's gaze and heart to the Lord, Who is the center of our prayer, Who re-presents before the pilgrimage of our history the true goal toward which we are directed.

Here is the thought of the Pope:

The idea that priest and people at prayer ought to look at each other comes exclusively from modern Christianity and is completely foreign to antiquity. Priest and people surely do not pray toward each other but toward the one Lord. Therefore, at prayer they face the same direction: either facing east as the cosmic symbol of the Lord Who is coming or, where this is not possible, toward an image of Christ in the apse, toward a cross, or simply toward Heaven, as the Lord did in His priestly prayer the night before His Passion (cf. John 17:1). Meanwhile, I am pleased that the proposal I made at the end of the chapter in question of my work, *Introduction to the Spirit of the Liturgy*, is advancing – not by way of new transformations but simply by placing a cross at the center of the altar, toward which all (priest and faithful) can look, so as to be guided toward the Lord, Whom all beseech together.” (*Theology of the Liturgy*)

The Christian Liturgy – and this is one of the fundamental truths – expresses in its own proper signs, the unbreakable bond between creation and covenant, between cosmic order and historic order of revelation. Thus must it always be.

Here is how the Holy Father expressed it in a homily for this year's Easter Vigil:

Now, one might ask: is it really important to speak also of creation during the Easter Vigil? Could we not begin with the events in which God calls man, forms a people for himself and creates his history with men upon the earth? The answer has to be: no. To omit the creation would be to misunderstand the very history of God with men, to diminish it, to lose sight of its true order of greatness. The sweep of history established by God reaches back to the origins, back to creation. Our profession of faith begins with the words: “We believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.” If we omit the beginning of the *Credo*, the whole history of salvation becomes too limited and too small.

Carrying within itself all the newness of salvation in Christ, the rite of the Church preserves and gathers together every expression of that cosmic liturgy that has characterized the life of peoples in search of God through the prism of creation. In the Eucharist, all the ancient cultural expressions find a “landing-place” of salvation. It is ever more significant, even from this point of view, that the First Eucharistic Prayer or Roman Canon, refers us to “the gifts of your servant Abel the just, the sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith, and the offering of

your high priest Melchizedek.”

In this passage from the ancient prayer of the Church, we find a reference to ancient sacrifices, to cosmic worship and related to creation that now, in Christian liturgy, is not only not denied, but rather assumed into the new and eternal sacrifice of Christ the Savior.

On the other hand, in this same perspective, one must look at the many signs and symbols of the covenant used to give form to the new Christian worship. One thinks of light and darkness, wind and fire, water and earth, the tree and its fruits. One deals with that material universe in which man is called to make evident the traces of God. And one thinks equally of the signs and symbols of social life: washing and anointing, breaking the bread and sharing the chalice.

Everything, therefore, in the liturgical rite, finds its authentic orientation, its proper direction, its most intimate truth.

How beautiful it is, therefore, to look toward the Lord and those visible signs which render it easier to turn toward Him with the countenance of one's heart! The fact that a crucifix could take away some visibility between the celebrant and the assembly should not be a cause for wonderment. That visibility is not what counts most in prayer. We should moreover marvel at the absence of eloquent signs that guarantee and favor such a turning to Christ, considering that only by turning to Christ are we able to see clearly the road we are to travel and the true nature of our destination.

Thus must it be for us, every time we participate in the celebration of the divine mysteries. Turned to Christ in prayer, we rediscover the direction of our existence, we become capable of interpreting the cosmos and history in the light of the Risen One, we re-enter into our daily lives ready to bear witness to the new hope that has been given to us. And the Solemnity of Corpus Christi helps us remember exactly this, by bringing us back to the essential truth of Christian liturgy and life.

Kneeling in the Presence of the Lord

From the moment that the Lord Himself is present in the Eucharist (for the Eucharist is in fact the Lord), Eucharistic adoration has also always been involved.

We know that in its solemn form Eucharistic adoration developed during the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, that was not an unwarranted change or one of decadence. Eucharistic adoration emerges in a more evident way in that historical period as a truth that was already present from Christian antiquity. Or, if the Lord gives us Himself, His own Body and Blood, receiving Him cannot but call for kneeling, adoring Him, and glorifying Him.

One thinks of the Gospel accounts of the gesture of Stephen (Acts 7:60), of Peter (Acts 9:40), and Paul (Acts 20:36), who prayed while kneeling. It is also worthwhile to recall the Christological hymn of the Epistle to the Philippians (2:6-11) that presents the cosmic liturgy as a kneeling at the mention of Jesus' Name (Ph 2:10) and to see in that text the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Is 45:23) concerning the lordship of the God of Israel with respect to the world. Kneeling before the Lord, the Church fulfills the truth, rendering homage to Him Who is the victor because He gave Himself up even unto death, death on a cross.

If the celebration of Corpus Christi is realized by standing before the Lord and in journeying toward His presence, this same celebration also finds an expression ever more rich with

significance in the act of adoration.

In this manner, the Church affirms the truth of things and, together, her greatest freedom. Only one who bends the knee and the heart before God can have true freedom – freedom from the powers of the world, from ancient forms of slavery, and from the new forms of slavery of the present age.

Refusing the Lord adoration goes against man, who then becomes capable of every degrading submission. Where God disappears, man remains entrapped in the slavery of various forms of idolatries. Adoring Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, present in the Eucharist, means celebrating true human freedom and, therefore, affirming man's greatest dignity. The dignity of a son, the son of a God Who created him, and Who loved him, and Who loves him even to the point of a total gift of Self.

On the other hand, the act of adoration also involves the act of adhesion, which is agreement or devotion. True adoration, in fact, is giving oneself to God and to other men. Authentic adoration is love, conformity to the Beloved, Who returns truth to our life and recreates our heart. There cannot be true adoration without generous adhesion.

The Church that bends her knee before the Lord, also bends her heart to His will. And in her we all find such a spiritual experience: we kneel with our body because our thoughts, sentiments, affections, behavior are also bent toward God's plan. Thus, in the act of adoration is present already the figure of the new world, renewed by the power and love of God in Christ, also become the history of all of us through the Church.

The Language of Adoration

The celebration of Corpus Christi introduces us, therefore, into the prayerful language of adoration. The feast of the Body and Blood of the Lord helps us keep such language with care, in the context of the liturgical celebration.

I am glad, in this context, to recall a fundamental element of this language. I am referring to sacred silence.

The liturgy, when it is celebrated well, must envision a felicitous alternation between silence and the spoken word, where silence animates the spoken word, permitting the voice to sound again in harmony with the heart, maintaining every vocal and bodily expression in a proper climate of recollection.

Where there would be a unilateral predominance of the spoken word, an authentic language of the liturgy would not resound. Therefore, the courage is needed to educate people to interiorization, which is the capacity to learn again the art of silence – that silence in which we learn the only Word that can save us from piling up vain words and empty, theatrical gestures.

Liturgical silence is sacred. It is not in fact a pause between a celebrating moment and the next moment. It is, moreover, a truly ritual moment, in a vital and reciprocal relationship to the word, vocal prayer, song, gesture, by means of which we live out the celebration of the mystery of Christ.

Moments of silence, which the Liturgy envisions and which are necessary to safeguard with attention, are important in and of themselves, but they also help in living the entire liturgical

celebration in a climate of recollection and of prayer, recuperating silence, which is an integral element of the liturgical act. Thus it is possible to anchor to the liturgy of silence as a true expression of a prayer of adoration.

From this point of view, we can understand better why, during the Eucharistic Liturgy and, in particular, the Canon, the praying people of God follow in silence the prayer of the priest-celebrant. That silence does not signify inactivity or lack of participation. That silence tends to allow everyone to enter into the significance of that ritual moment which re-presents, in the reality of the sacrament, the act of love with which Jesus offers Himself to the Father on the Cross for the salvation of the world. That silence, truly sacred, is the liturgical space in which to say “yes,” with all the strength of our being, to the action of Christ, so that it becomes also our action in daily life.

Liturgical silence, then, is sacred because it is the spiritual place in which to realize the adhesion of our whole life to the life of the Lord; it is the space of the prolonged “amen” of the heart that surrenders to the love of God and embraces it as the new criterion of one’s own life. It is precisely this stupendous significance of the final “amen” of the doxology at the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer, in which all say aloud what we have said for such a long time in the silence of a praying heart.

The relationship between celebration and adoration

The Solemnity of Corpus Christi, with the contemporaneous presence of celebration and adoration, likewise has the capacity to make us live in healthy harmony the vital relationship between these two Eucharistic moments. In the context of a convention such as this one, it is worthwhile perhaps to spend some time considering the value of adoration in relation to the Eucharistic celebration.

In fact, as the Magisterium of the Church always reminds – even of late – the act of Eucharistic adoration follows on the celebration, as its prolongation. And, on the other hand, adoration can help preserve in the heart the fruit of the celebration, grounding it in the heart of the person praying.

The mystery of salvation, of Christ dead and risen for us, that in the Eucharistic celebration is always rendered present again, in adoration is completed and, in a manner of speaking, assimilated, in such a way that little by little it becomes ever more vital.

From this point of view, adoration brings to fulfillment what is already implied in the Eucharistic celebration. In effect, what is definitive for the Liturgy is that those who participate in it might pray to share the same sacrifice of the Lord, His act of adoration, becoming a single entity with Him, the true Body of Christ that is the Church. In other words, what is essential is that in the end the difference between Christ’s action and our action is overcome, so that there would be a progressive harmonization between His life and ours, between His adoring sacrifice and ours, so that there would be only one action, at one and the same time, His action and ours. What Saint Paul affirmed is nothing other than what is the necessary consequence of the liturgical celebration: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me”(Gal 2:20). And this is the goal of Eucharistic adoration.

As an additional affirmation of what St. Paul teaches, let us listen to the Holy Father in a passage from his Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*:

As Saint Augustine put it: “*nemo autem illam carnem manducat, nisi prius adoraverit; peccemus non adorando* – no one eats that flesh without first adoring it; we should sin were we not to adore it.” In the Eucharist, the Son of God comes to meet us and desires to become one with us; Eucharistic adoration is simply the natural consequence of the Eucharistic celebration, which is itself the Church's supreme act of adoration. Receiving the Eucharist means adoring him whom we receive. Only in this way do we become one with him, and are given, as it were, a foretaste of the beauty of the heavenly liturgy. The act of adoration outside Mass prolongs and intensifies all that takes place during the liturgical celebration itself. Indeed, "only in adoration can a profound and genuine reception mature. And it is precisely this personal encounter with the Lord that then strengthens the social mission contained in the Eucharist, which seeks to break down not only the walls that separate the Lord and ourselves, but also and especially the walls that separate us from one another. (n. 66)

Standing, walking, adoring. In these three verbs and in what they signify, is found the truth of the celebration of Corpus Christi, to which we must always return. We must remember that returning to such a truth bears with it every time the stupendous and joyous rediscovery of the heart, of the center, of the treasure of the Church and her liturgy.

For this reason, in the Sequence for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, we sing: “*Sit laus plena, sit sonora, / sit iucunda, sit decora / mentis iubilatio*” (“Let the praise be loud and high: Sweet and tranquil be the joy / Felt today in every breast”).

Reverend Monsignor Guido Marini
Master of Pontifical Liturgical Celebrations

