



OFFICE FOR THE LITURGICAL CELEBRATIONS
OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF

**TO ENTER INTO THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY
THROUGH THE RITES AND PRAYERS**

*Diocesan Gathering “The Liturgy: Between Competence and Charism”
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Reasons for the Title of the Address

“... through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 48). It seems proper to me that there could not be a title that better expresses one of the elements which describes the liturgy in a major way and which, together, picks up a fundamental orientation from the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council.

In effect, it is precisely about this topic that we speak when speaking of the Liturgy: the collection of rites and prayers through which we are able to have access to the mystery of Christ, given to us through the Church.

Therefore, it is worth the effort to reflect calmly on each of the expressions contained in the title of the conference entrusted to me, during which I intend to make frequent references to the theological thought of Cardinal Ratzinger and to the Magisterium of Pope Benedict XVI, above all, because I consider it a pleasant and urgent duty for me to be the faithful interpreter and echo of his authoritative liturgical orientation, which does not pertain to the realm of “personal taste” (although such personal taste is more than respected while not necessarily shared by all), but rather to a true and proper Magisterium to be shared with a spirit of faith and a genuine ecclesial sense.

1. “The Mystery That Is Celebrated”

The actual presence of our salvation

We know very well that in the Liturgy the mystery of our salvation is made present in a sacramental way. He Who is risen from the dead, the Living One, renews His redemptive sacrifice through the power of the Holy Spirit. “Who, therefore, saves the world and man? The only answer we can give is: Jesus of Nazareth, Lord and Christ, Crucified and Risen,” affirmed Pope Benedict recently. “And where is the Mystery of the Death and Resurrection of Christ that brings about salvation? In Christ's action through the Church, and in particular in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, which makes the redemptive sacrificial offering of the Son

of God present....”(1)

The Liturgy, therefore, is not something we remember but which time has relegated to a past left behind forever. Nor does it deal with an assemblage of rites, purely esthetically lovely, but bereft of life and incapable of communicating salvation. Nor does it deal with a mere assembly of persons who share an ideal and intend to form a community. Rather, the Liturgy deals with a celebration by which we truly enter into a relationship with the mystery of our salvation, with Christ the Lord, the Savior, Who communicates His very own life to us – His grace. Thus the past is rendered present, the beautiful truly manifests the beauty of the Living God, and new fraternal relations are the fruit of the work of the Lord in the heart of man.

In my view, it is essential that every Christian generation renew the perception of faith concerning such a reality, that is to say, of a celebration that is truly the means by which an encounter with the Lord takes place in the “today” of our life and history. It always strikes me how much the most experienced guides say to the visitors of the Basilica of Saint Peter's in Rome, when they stop to contemplate Michelangelo's masterpiece, the Pietà. As you know, the work of this great artist is located where preparations are currently made for the Eucharistic celebration whenever the Holy Father is present. Thus, the guides point out that the hands of the Madonna are open almost as if wanting to hand over the sacrificed Body of Jesus to the onlooker. The Pietà was created by Michelangelo as a frontal for an altar and, therefore, was destined to be the background for the altar of the Eucharistic celebration. In this way, the celebrant and the entire assembly would be able to contemplate the gesture of the Most Holy Virgin, in the act of giving the Savior to the Church during the Eucharistic celebration. How beautiful to recall this artistic detail! In the celebration of the Mass, the Risen Lord through His Word, in His Body and Blood, gives Himself to us, so that we can enter into the mystery of His life, and thus be saved.

Permit me, by the way, to call your attention to another artistic detail of the splendid Basilica of Saint Peter. The baldacchino that stands above the great altar of the *confessio* is the work of Bernini. If we observe carefully the drapery that covers the high part of the baldacchino, we can note that the design does not appear static but rather capable of giving a clear impression of dynamism. In other words, it seems that that drapery could be moved by a gust of wind – as delicate as it is imposing.

In this way, Bernini intended to underscore what takes place at the moment of the Eucharistic Prayer, and, in particular, at the moment of the consecration: the Holy Spirit truly descends upon the altar of Eucharistic celebration and is the Creator, together with the words and actions of Christ, of the substantial transformation or “transubstantiation” of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of the Lord (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1353). The Spirit, Who is the Giver of Life, makes truly present the Risen Lord in the act of His redemptive sacrifice. And so, expressed in art is the reality of the mystery that is celebrated. Here and now, the Savior is present and acting in His mystery of love and of grace. John Paul II said: “Since the Liturgy is the exercise of the priesthood of Christ, it is necessary to keep ever alive the affirmation of the disciple faced with the mysterious presence of the Lord: ‘It is the Lord!’ (Jn 21:7). Nothing of what we do in the Liturgy can appear more important than what in an unseen but real manner Christ accomplishes by the power of his Spirit.”(2) This truth of liturgical action must always be at the center of the faith-awareness of those who participate in the liturgical celebration.

The Sacred Mystery

I will now reflect for a moment on the word “mystery.” It is clear that by using this term we do not intend something obscure, esoteric and disquieting. Rather, we intend to highlight the salvific work of God, Whose light is so illuminating, although never making it completely comprehensible to man; the human person must, at a certain point along the way, leave room for faith in order to have access to the One Who is Truth. As we usually say, it is precisely such salvific work that is celebrated in the Liturgy. Therefore, it is not the work of man that has primacy in the Eucharistic celebration but the work of God, the paschal event of the Lord's Death and Resurrection. We do not want to misunderstand the importance of man's work in the Liturgy, but to put in proper perspective the relationship of the necessary dependence of human action on that of the Lord's Own action.

Thus, in this regard, Benedict XVI gave the following explanation when addressing the bishops of the Brazilian Episcopal Conference during their *ad limina* visit:

Now, the main, fundamental attitude of the Christian faithful who take part in the liturgical celebration is not action but listening, opening themselves, receiving. . . . It is clear that in this case receiving does not mean remaining passive or uninterested in what is going on there but cooperating since by God's grace they are once again enabled to do so in accordance with “the real nature of the true Church. The Church is essentially both human and divine, visible but endowed with invisible realities, zealous in action and dedicated to contemplation, present in the world, but as a pilgrim, so constituted that in her the human is directed toward and subordinated to the divine, the visible to the invisible, action to contemplation, and this present world to that city yet to come, the object of our quest” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 2). If, in the Liturgy the figure of Christ Who is its principle and is really present to make it effective were not to emerge we should no longer have the Christian liturgy, completely dependent upon the Lord and sustained by His creative presence.”(3)

For this reason, it is necessary to join the term “sacred” to the term “mystery.” To affirm the “sacrality” of the Liturgy means to remember the necessity of safeguarding with care the mystery that is being celebrated in the Liturgy. Liturgical sacrality is the objectivity of the mystery that, time after time, does not cease to interest man – inasmuch as it gives man what he really needs and saves him, permitting him to enter into true joy.

In this sense, the acceptance of the mystery in view of personal transformation and conversion is the principal act to which we are called in the celebration of the Liturgy. This is, if we want to call it such, the most authentic creativity that ought to characterize the life of the individual believer and of the celebrating community. Other types of creativity, when not envisioned by the rite itself and which we can easily describe as terribly detracting from the truth of the Eucharistic celebration, only run the risk of being the expression of a celebration of oneself as an individual or as a particular community. These forms of creativity lose sight of the primary subject of the Liturgy, Who is God.

In Cardinal Ratzinger's address to the Chilean Episcopal Conference on 3 July 1988, he made the following explanation in this regard:

We ought to get back the dimension of the sacred in the Liturgy. The Liturgy is not a festivity; it is not a meeting for the purpose of having a good time. It is of no importance that the parish priest has cudgeled his brains to come up with suggestive ideas or imaginative novelties. The Liturgy is what makes the Thrice-Holy God present amongst us; it is the burning bush; it is the Alliance of God with man in Jesus Christ, Who has died and risen again. The grandeur of the Liturgy does not rest upon the fact that it offers an interesting

entertainment, but in rendering tangible the Totally Other, Whom we are not capable of summoning. He comes because He wills. In other words, the essential in the Liturgy is the mystery, which is realized in the common ritual of the Church; all the rest diminishes it. Men experiment with it in lively fashion, and find themselves deceived, when the mystery is transformed into distraction, when the chief actor in the Liturgy is not the Living God but the priest or the liturgical director.

In this context, we should not underestimate the inherent question of liturgical rubrics and, more generally speaking, the norms regarding the Liturgy. The liturgical norms, in fact, serve as the closest guardian of the mystery being celebrated. The rubrics affirm and equally guarantee ritual unity and, consequently, are capable of giving expression to the catholicity of the Church's liturgy. At the same time, norms serve as a vehicle for liturgical and doctrinal content that a centuries-old tradition and proven experience have transmitted to us and which it is wrong to treat with superficiality and to pollute with our poor and limited subjectivity. Herein lies the foundation of this observation that time and again has been re-proposed by the Papal Magisterium, past and present. “Since liturgical celebrations are not private acts but ‘celebrations of the Church, the sacrament of unity,’” affirmed John Paul II, “their regulation is dependent solely upon the hierarchical authority of the Church. The Liturgy belongs to the whole body of the Church. It is for this reason that it is not permitted to anyone, even the priest, or any group, to subtract or change anything whatsoever on their own initiative.”⁽⁴⁾

“Holy Mass, celebrated with respect for the liturgical norms and with appropriate appreciation of the riches of the signs and gestures,” affirmed Benedict XVI, “encourages and develops growth in Eucharistic faith.”

He continues:

In the Eucharistic celebration we do not invent something but rather enter into a reality that precedes us, indeed that embraces Heaven and earth and therefore also past, future and present. This universal openness, this encounter with all God's sons and daughters is the greatness of the Eucharist: Let us go to meet the reality of God present among us in the Body and Blood of the Risen One. Therefore, the liturgical prescriptions dictated by the Church are not external appendices but express in practice this reality of the revelation of Christ's Body and Blood, and thus prayer reveals faith, according to the ancient principle *lex orandi – lex credendi*. And for this reason, we can say that “the best catechesis on the Eucharist is the Eucharist itself, celebrated well” (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 64).⁽⁵⁾

Therefore, it is necessary to have an attitude that is balanced, capable of maintaining as complementary and necessary the ritual and symbolic perspective, as well as the canonical and disciplinary perspective – not one perspective without the other, but the one with the other.

2. “To enter”

The meaning of the verb:

The verb, “to enter,” chosen as part of the title, is an important verb because it also leads us to the major theme of participation in the liturgical celebration – a theme that impassions and inspires us and that at times leads to discussions which, in my opinion, also lead to useless polemics and divisions. Who among us, in fact, does not desire the Liturgy to be truly

participated in by everyone? Above all, from the time of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, and thereafter, hasn't the reform begun by the *Second Vatican Council* and continued by later Papal Magisterium rightly insisted on the most ample and authentic realization of such participation? On the other hand, if the life of the Church and the encounter of every man with Christ the Savior is something dear to everyone's heart, can we not perhaps desire that all participate in the Sacred Liturgy with the greatest possible benefit?

Therefore, on this score, I would say that it would be difficult to have divergent opinions. The disparity of views can take place when we seek to specify better what we mean by participation, or what would be more adequate ways needed for entering into the mystery being celebrated. And we know, as far as this is concerned, how two diverse ways of considering the term "enter" often continue to be contrasted. As always in Catholic doctrine, so too in this case, there is no room for *aut/aut* (either/or), or for the exclusion of one aspect in favor of another aspect, but for *et/et* (both/and), or for the complementary and enriching presence of different aspects.

To enter into a reality, to participate in an event is always an experience that involves man in his every dimension: intellect, will, emotion, sentiment, action, etc. The external nature of action and its interior foundation result as complementary and necessary. And so, it is for the liturgical life, precisely because life's experience must be concerned with the whole complexity of the human person. For example, if there is participation that comes about by means of comprehending a text, it is also a form of participation that occurs when the soul is uplifted as it encounters the beautiful. And as the soul participates by means of action, it is also possible to realize a true participation by means of silence – which only *appears* to be inactive.

Consequently, in the mystery being celebrated, we enter with the entire complexity of our human persons. And this is why the Liturgy always seeks that healthy equilibrium of components that would afford the possibility of an experience that belongs to the whole of man and to every man.

It seems to me that this does not always find a happy and balanced realization in liturgical practice. And it also seems to me that, according to the law of the pendulum, if at one time the lack of adequate participation may have been due to a defect in understanding and action, today such a lack of adequate participation may be due to an excess of rational comprehension and external action, to which there is not always present a sufficient and complementary understanding of the heart and attention to the interior action, so as to re-live in oneself the sentiments and thoughts of Christ.

To enter into the action of Christ:

Now let us go a little deeper into the question, starting from the direction clearly formulated by the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the *Second Vatican Council*:

The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. They should be instructed by God's Word and be nourished at the table of the Lord's Body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn also to offer themselves; through Christ the Mediator, they

should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all. (n. 48)

As a way of commenting on this always illuminating magisterial passage, Cardinal Ratzinger affirmed in his book, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*:

But what does the active participation come down to? What does it mean that we have to do? Unfortunately, the word was very quickly misunderstood to mean something external, entailing a need for general activity, as if as many people as possible, as often as possible, should be visibly engaged in action. However, the word “part-icipation” refers to a principal action in which everyone has a “part.” And so, if we want to discover the kind of doing that active participation involves, we need, first of all, to determine what this central *actio* is in which all the members of the community are supposed to participate. The study of the liturgical sources provides an answer that at first may surprise us, though, in the light of the biblical foundations considered in the first part, it is quite self-evident. By the *actio* of the Liturgy the sources mean the Eucharistic Prayer. The real liturgical action, the true liturgical act, is the *oratio*. . . This *oratio* – the Eucharistic Prayer, the “Canon” – is really more than speech; it is *actio* in the highest sense of the word. For what happens in it is that the human *actio*. . . steps back and makes way for the *actio divina*, the action of God.(6)

In the liturgical celebration what precedes and constitutes the foundation is the action of Christ and of His Church; in fact, as Pope John Paul II recalled, “Since Christ’s Death on the Cross and His Resurrection constitute the content of the daily life of the Church and the pledge of His eternal Passover, the Liturgy has as its first task to lead us untiringly back to the Easter pilgrimage initiated by Christ, in which we accept death in order to enter into life.”(7) Consequently, to enter into the liturgical act means entering into the action that confers salvation and transforms life. We participate, therefore, to the extent that the action of the Lord and of His Church also become our action, His oblation of love becomes our oblation of love, His filial and obedient abandonment to the Father becomes ours as well – if the Sacrifice of the Redeemer becomes our own sacrifice.

Divo Barsotti affirms in his celebrated text:

It truly pertains to the Christian Liturgy to transcend the activity of every man and of every activity of humanity by being the Act of Christ Himself. However, the Liturgy transcends every human activity without excluding it, engaging it fully and profoundly, not only insofar as the Liturgy transcends the human activity, but also in that it requires and comprehends the human activity.(8)

As always happens in what is human, so too in the liturgical rite, action has both an external and an internal dimension. The gesture of Christ is a visible gesture that expresses an invisible reality. Moreover, the act of entering into the mystery will undoubtedly possess an external gesture as a component. But since such a component does not remain purely a sterile form of externalism, it will have to be enlivened and at the same time lead to that interior action in which there is conformity to the action of Christ and of His Church.

Therefore, space should be given to external action in the Liturgy, where the rite permits it and makes it auspicious – but without forgetting that such action will always have to be redirected to its correct expression of interior action. Only in that way will there be authentic access to the mystery that is celebrated.

3. “Through Rites and Prayers”

What has been said about entering into the mystery has had a general character to it. Now, by mentioning rites and prayers, the title of the talk allows us to enter into a more specific realm, or into the typical mode of the Liturgy to make accessible the participation of the mystery being celebrated.

Rites and prayers in the Liturgy are sustained by each other and enlighten one another, precisely so as to make the celebration come alive. The rite would remain deprived of light without the prayer that enlightens it; the prayer would remain deprived of efficacy without the rite that puts it into action. Furthermore, the liturgical celebration demands that type of faith that remains neither extraneous to prayer nor extraneous to the rite.

With good reason has the tradition of the Church always held in great esteem the famous catecheses of the ancient Fathers of the Church – catecheses which, going back to the prayers and rites, introduce the faithful to the knowledge and experience of the mystery being celebrated. At the present time, we recognize the great need for such catecheses. In fact, presenting Christian culture as esoteric to very young people and very broadly within the social context leads to a serious form of “ignorance” with respect to the rites and prayers of the Liturgy. And we cannot ask of the Liturgy what it cannot give – catechesis. Undoubtedly, the Liturgy is learned by living it, however, a type of catechesis is necessary that is also a movement toward liturgical experience, serving as an introduction to the divine mysteries.

It seems to me that the same task that was thought urgent at the time of the Second Vatican Council has remained urgent to the present time, perhaps with a sense of greater urgency – the need for formation. Only thanks to a true liturgical formation will the rites and prayers of the celebration be able to serve as a beautiful and extraordinarily rich vehicle for entering into the mystery being celebrated. Otherwise, we risk remaining at the threshold of an inaccessible reality.

On the other hand, it is good to remember that the liturgical celebration realized according to the truth and in conformity with the *ars celebrandi* (“art of celebrating”) of which the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, speaks to us in his apostolic exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, or in full conformity with the norms of the Church, is already *per se* a true and proper school, capable of leading to knowledge and experience of the mystery of Christ. Therefore, rites and prayers celebrated well are an authentic introduction to the spirit of the Liturgy.

It is not, however, my intention to enter into the details of the rites and prayers, insofar as I would like to focus my consideration on certain aspects of the acts of the liturgical celebration that help us to enter into the Sacred Liturgy, into its rites and prayers. The aspects that will be considered will only be a handful – those that seem to me more important and urgent to underscore and to explain in the present historical context. It is not my intention thereby to diminish the importance of other aspects, but we cannot say everything and it is necessary to provide a certain priority.

Sacred Silence

A well-celebrated liturgy, in its various parts, provides for a happy alternation of silence and the spoken word, as silence gives life to the word, permitting the voice to resound with extraordinary profundity, maintaining every vocal expression in the right climate of recollection. We recall in this regard the affirmation found in the General Instruction of the

Sacred silence also, as part of the celebration, is to be observed at the designated times. Its purpose, however, depends on the time it occurs in each part of the celebration. Thus within the Act of Penitence and again after the invitation to pray, all recollect themselves; but at the conclusion of a reading or the homily, all meditate briefly on what they have heard; then after Communion, they praise and pray to God in their hearts. (n. 45)

The General Instruction does nothing more than make explicit what *Sacrosanctum Concilium* formulated in general terms: “. . . at the proper times all should observe a reverent silence.” (n. 30)

It should be noted that in both texts just cited “sacred silence” is mentioned. The silence requested, moreover, is not to be considered along the lines of a mere pause between one moment of celebration and another that follows. Rather, it is to be considered as a true and proper ritual moment, complementary to the proclamation of the Word, to vocal prayer, to song, to gesture, etc.

From this point of view, we can better understand why during the Liturgy of the Eucharist and, in particular, during the Canon, the People of God, united in prayer, follow in silence the prayer of the priest-celebrant. That silence does not mean being inactive or lacking participation. That silence is intended to allow everyone to enter into the significance of that ritual moment which renews 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” to the action of Christ with all the strength of our being, so that the action of Christ becomes our very own in daily life.

Thus, liturgical silence is truly sacred because it is the spiritual place to realize the adherence of our whole life to the life of the Lord; it is the space of the prolonged “amen” of the heart surrendering to the love of God and embracing that love as a new criterion of our own existence. Is this not perhaps the stupendous significance of the “amen” that concludes the doxology at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, in which we vocalize what for such a long time we have been repeating in the silence of our hearts rapt in prayer?

If all this is the meaning of silence in the Liturgy, is it not perhaps true that our liturgies are in need of more room for sacred silence?

Noble Beauty

Pope Benedict XVI affirms in *Sacramentum Caritatis*:

This relationship between creed and worship is evidenced in a particular way by the rich theological and liturgical category of beauty. Like the rest of Christian Revelation, the Liturgy is inherently linked to beauty: it is *veritatis splendor*.... This is no mere aestheticism, but the concrete way in which the truth of God's love in Christ encounters us, attracts us and delights us, enabling us to emerge from ourselves and drawing us towards our true vocation, which is love. The truest beauty is the love of God, Who definitively revealed Himself to us in the paschal mystery. . . . Beauty, then, is not mere decoration, but rather an essential element of the liturgical action, since it is an attribute of God Himself and His revelation. These considerations should make us realize the care which is needed, if the liturgical action is to reflect its innate splendor. (n. 35)

The words of the Pope could not be clearer. It follows from them that no form of stinginess is admissible, nor any type of minimalism and of ill-intentioned impoverishment in the liturgical celebration. The beautiful, in its diverse ancient and modern forms in which it finds expression, is the proper means by which the mystery of the beauty of the love of God shines forth in our liturgies, even if always but dimly. Hence, why we can never do enough to beautify our rites! The Church teaches us that, in her long history, she has never feared to “waste” in order to surround the liturgical celebration with the highest expressions of art: from architecture to sculpture, to music, to sacred objects. The saints, despite their personal poverty, have always taught us to desire that only the best things be set aside for divine worship.

Once again, let us listen to Benedict XVI:

Our earthly liturgies, entirely ordered to the celebration of this unique act within history, will never fully express its infinite meaning. Certainly, the beauty of our celebrations can never be sufficiently cultivated, fostered and refined, for nothing can be too beautiful for God, Who is Himself infinite Beauty. Yet our earthly liturgies will never be more than a pale reflection of the Liturgy celebrated in the Jerusalem on high, the goal of our pilgrimage on earth. May our own celebrations nonetheless resemble that Liturgy as closely as possible and grant us a foretaste of it!(9)

The Crucifix at the Center of the Altar

In Cardinal Ratzinger’s *Feast of Faith*, which first came out in 1981, he presented the problem of the orientation of the altar in the context of the liturgical celebration. To cite here some passages of his text seems to me to be the most immediate way to understand the importance of his reflection and his proposal:

For the true location and the true context of the Eucharistic celebration is the whole cosmos. “Facing east” makes the cosmic dimension of the Eucharist present through liturgical gesture. Because of the rising of the sun, the east – *oriens* – was naturally both a symbol of the Resurrection (and to that extent it was not merely a Christological statement but also a reminder of the Father’s power and the influence of the Holy Spirit) and a presentation of the hope of the Parousia. . . . So what has come down to us in the altar cross is a relic of the ancient eastward orientation. It maintained the ancient tradition of praying to the Lord Who is to come under the sign of the cross, a tradition with strong associations, in former times, with the cosmic symbol of the “east.” . . . Even now, when the priest faces the people, the cross could be placed on the altar in such a way that both priest and people can see it. At the Eucharistic Prayer they should not look at one another; together they ought to behold Him, the Pierced Savior (Zech 12:10; Rev 1:7). . . . But the cross on the altar is not obstructing the view; it is the common point of reference. . . . I would even be so bold as to suggest that the cross on the altar is actually a necessary precondition for celebrating toward the people. It would help in clarifying the distinction between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The first is concerned with proclamation and hence with a direct, face-to-face situation, whereas the second is a matter of all of us worshiping together in response to the call “*Conversi ad Dominum*” – “Let us turn to the Lord; let us be converted to the Lord!”(10)

In light of these clear affirmations, we understand better what is underscored by the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, in the Preface to the first volume of his *Collected Works (Opera Omnia)*, dedicated to the Liturgy and only recently released in Italy:

The idea that priest and people must look at each other in prayer is a novelty of modern Christianity and is completely foreign to ancient Christianity. Priest and people certainly do not pray facing one other, but facing the one Lord. Therefore, during prayer they look in the same direction: or toward the East as a cosmic symbol in expectation 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 High Priestly Prayer on the night before His Passion (Jn 17:1). In the meantime, the proposal I made at the end of the chapter about this topic in my work, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (pp. 83-84) is steadily making progress, namely, not to make any new changes, but simply to place the cross at the center of the altar, toward which the priest and faithful can look together, thus allowing themselves to be guided toward the Lord, Whom we beseech all together.

Adoration

What do we mean by adoration? Certainly, it does not mean an intellectual or sentimental relationship to the mystery. Adoration could be defined as the full recognition of wonder before the omnipotence of God, of His intangible majesty, of His provident and merciful Lordship, of His infinite beauty that is the coming together of truth and love. And adoration, when it is authentic, leads to adherence or to the reunification of man and creation with God, to man's exit from a state of separation from God toward a communion of life with Christ. All this is what the Church, the Spouse of Christ, experiences in the celebration of the Liturgy. Adore and adhere, adore so that you may adhere to Christ.

Let us listen once again to Divo Barsotti in his already cited work:

And the Event, the Act of Christ, is first and foremost a Sacrifice, a Sacrifice of Adoration. The Word, in the human nature He assumed, acknowledges with His death the infinite holiness of God and His sovereignty. In Him creation finally adores. . . . Our participation in the Sacrifice of Jesus requires that we undergo the same self-emptying as He. The earthly condition of our life, in its voluntary acceptance, becomes the sign of our participation in the Sacrifice of Jesus and in His adoration.(11)

And so, everything in the liturgical action must lead to adoration: the music, the chant, the silence, the way of proclaiming the Word of God and of praying, the gestures, the liturgical vestments and sacred vessels; likewise, too, the entire complex of the sacred edifice should lead us to adoration. For a moment, I would like to focus on a gesture that is typical and central to adoration that today runs the risk of disappearing, namely, kneeling. I make reference here to a text of Cardinal Ratzinger:

We know that the Lord prayed remaining on His knees (Lk 22:41), that Stephen (Acts 7:60), Peter (Acts 9:40) and Paul (Acts 20:36) prayed on their knees. The Christological hymn of the Letter to the Philippians (2:6-11) presents the liturgy of the cosmos as a bending of the knee at the name of Jesus (2:10) and sees in it a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah (45:23) on the lordship of the God of Israel over the world. Bending the knee at the name of Jesus, the Church brings forth the truth; she becomes part of the gesture of the cosmos which renders homage to the Victor and thus places herself on the side of the Victor, so that genuflection is an imitative representation of the attitude of the One Who “was equal to God” and “humbled Himself unto death.”(12)

It is also for this reason that it is entirely appropriate to maintain the practice of kneeling to receive Holy Communion. For further confirmation of this position, let us listen to the Holy

Father in another passage from *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. (n. 66)

Can we not, then, speak in this regard of a contradiction with respect to moving forward in procession, as a sign of a people that turns toward her Lord? The Church that, in her external movement, processes and turns toward the Lord is the same Church that, always externally and symbolically, kneels and adores in His Presence. Once again, we are not dealing here with one view to the exclusion of all others, but with a great richness that results from complementary views.

In light of this passage, we can also understand the reason why Pope Benedict XVI, on the occasion of the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord in 2008, began to distribute Holy Communion to the faithful while kneeling.

Chant and Music

I would like to begin this section with a citation from Pope Saint Gregory the Great, in which we find formulated, with singular depth and force, the central nucleus of music and singing in the Liturgy:

For the voice of melody, whenever it is moved by the intention of the heart, is made thereby to return again to the heart by the agency of Almighty God, so that it pours the mysteries of prophecy or the grace of compunction into the intent mind. Whence it is written: “The sacrifice of praise shall glorify me: and there is the way by which I will show him the salvation of God” (Ps 49:23). As in the Latin *salutare*, so in Hebrew Jesus is meant. Furthermore, the way of revelation of Christ is in the sacrifice of praise, because while compunction is poured out through the melody, a way is opened in our hearts whereby we can finally approach Christ, as He speaks of the revelation of Himself. (*In Ez. hom.* I, 15)

Thus singing and music in the Liturgy, when they are truly themselves, are born from a heart that searches after the mystery of God and becomes an exegesis of this same mystery, a word that in musical notation opens onto the horizon of Christ's salvation. Therefore, there is an intrinsic bond among word, music and chant in the liturgical celebration. Music and chant, in fact, cannot be separated from the Word of God, of which indeed music and chant ought to be a faithful interpretation and revelation. Chant and music in the Liturgy stem from the depth of the heart, that is, from Christ Who dwells therein – and they return to the heart, that is to Christ. And from the question of the heart, He comes as the true and definitive response. This objectivity of chant and liturgical music should never be consigned to the superficial and extemporaneous nature of our sentiments and fleeting emotions that do not correspond to the greatness of the mystery being celebrated.

And so, it is right to affirm that chant and music in the Liturgy are born from prayer and lead to prayer. Therefore, they permit us to enter into the mystery – to return to the terminology that is part of the title of this Conference. And here, in chant and in music, we find perhaps

one of the highest ways by which we enter and participate in the mystery, capable of making a synthesis of so many components of liturgical participation.

Speaking of chant and of music, here permit me to mention briefly the Latin language, in which we find an extraordinary treasure of chant and liturgical music handed down to us from centuries past – a treasure the Church has defined as perennially valid, in and of itself; it is also a criterion for establishing what can be considered as truly liturgical in new musical forms that continue to develop in the course of time. I am referring here to Gregorian Chant and to sacred, classical polyphony, forms of liturgical music to be appreciated, today as yesterday, because they are proper to the Liturgy and have both artistic value and religious content, and thus should have a place in the liturgical celebration. The perennial value of Gregorian Chant and classical polyphony consists in their capacity to interpret the Word of God and, therefore, the mystery being celebrated and of being at the service of the Liturgy without making the Liturgy something that merely serves music and singing. Can we give up the preservation of such treasures that centuries of Church history have handed down to us? Can we cease to draw today from that extraordinary patrimony of spirituality? How will it ever be possible to give flesh to a wider and more worthy repertoire of singing and music, if we do not allow ourselves to be educated by what inspires?

And so, one reason to preserve dutifully the use of Latin – without forgetting also the other aspects of this liturgical language, expressive of the universality and catholicity of the Church, which cannot be justifiably set aside. In this regard, how can we not feel an extraordinary experience of catholicity of the Church when in Saint Peter's Basilica men and women of all continents, nationalities and different languages pray and sing together in the same language? Who does not perceive a warm welcome of a common home when, entering a church in a foreign land, one can unite himself to brethren in the faith through the use of the same language (at least in some parts)?

So that this may continue to be concretely possible, it is necessary that the use of Latin be preserved in our churches and communities with the requisite pastoral wisdom.

Conclusion

As has been said, in considering certain aspects related to liturgical celebration, some priority must be followed. To underscore some priorities, to place in the light some problems, to look toward some possible changes comes from a desire to make a contribution to the full and authentic realization of the liturgical reform undertaken at the Second Vatican Council. For all of us, that reform was and is providential in the historic path of the Church, which develops and grows according to a logic of organic continuity with her past. But precisely because we desire that the carrying out of such a reform would produce all its desired effects, it is also right to examine the problems that have arisen in the course of time from certain not always felicitous assertions and from other concrete realizations not always truly inspired. True fidelity to the reform willed by Vatican II demands that while we promote all that is a true gift of renewal, we take into account existing problems with freedom of spirit, an ecclesial spirit, and without ideologically preconceived notions. It is one and the same love that must animate everyone – love for the Lord and His Church, love for the Liturgy, which is the action of Christ and the Church.

Reverend Monsignor Guido Marini
Master of Pontifical Liturgical Celebrations

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- (1) General Audience, 5 May 2010.
- (2) Apostolic Letter, *Vicesimus Quintus Annus*, 10.
- (3) 15 April 2010.
- (4) Apostolic Letter, *Vicesimus Quintus Annus*, 25.
- (5) Address to the Ecclesial Convention of the Diocese of Rome, 15 June 2010.
- (6) *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), pp. 171-172.
- (7) Apostolic Letter, *Vicesimus Quintus Annus*, n. 6.
- (8) *Il Mistero della Chiesa nella Liturgia (The Mystery of the Church in the Liturgy)*. Edizioni San Paolo (2007), p. 158.
- (9) Homily for the Celebration of Vespers in the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, 12 September 2008.
- (10) *Feast of Faith* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), pp. 140-145 *passim*.
- (11) *Op. Cit.*, pp. 174-175.
- (12) See the review *Communio* 35/1977.

