

The Classical Roman Rite and the Renewal of the Liturgy©

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Centrality of the Mass in the Life of the Church

My talk to you today is about the Classical Roman Rite and the renewal of the liturgy. First of all, I believe we are all convinced here that a renewal of the liturgy, in whatever way, is urgently needed for the good of Universal Church. And the good thing is that we are not the only ones who think this way, but there is a man on the Throne of Peter who is as convinced as we are that something has to be done, and something has to be done very soon. He has made that very clear in many books that he published as Prefect of the Congregation for the Faith, and he has repeated this publicly and privately many times.

In a preface to a book that Dom Alcuin Reid has published about the organic growth of the liturgy, the Holy Father compares the Church to a gardener and says that every change in the liturgy has to be organic growth. So you cannot cut away pieces, you cannot simply destroy a plant that you want to grow, but you must be very careful to find for this plant a good time in the year to plant it, the right nourishment, the best place for it to be and grow, and then you must take care of it with great prudence daily and without interruption. It is very important that our Holy Father has made this remark because this is implicitly a critique of so many things that have happened in the last forty years. People have believed that the wonderful plant of the liturgy that God has planted in the midst of the Church can be treated like a plastic plant, that you can expose it as you want to your whims, that this plant is more beautiful than a real rose.

The outcome of that is much too obvious to all of us, and I do not want to spend this evening by enumerating stories that you all know about the numerous abuses that the liturgy has undergone in these last years. The Holy See, in the famous document has far as I recall, enumerated at least sixty types of abuse that are prohibited and still continue, and with that has shown that there is a problem.

Well, the Institute of Christ the King is very clear about how to resolve the problem. The problem is, first of all, to recognize the place of the liturgy in the Church. This will be the first of my topics today. We have to understand that the liturgy is not a decoration on a cake, like a little bit of whipped cream that you place on a wonderful birthday cake to make it more beautiful. The Church, even today in the crisis that we are undergoing, is still a very impressive worldwide operation. If you only think that the Church most certainly has the greatest number of charitable organizations in the whole world, that the church has hundreds and thousands of hospitals, of kindergartens, of orphanages, of schools, of universities, of all kinds of operations that take care of the needs of people in our times. The Church is like -- and this is not a word coined by me but by a German scholar -- the Church seems to be like a frozen giant. It is sad that She is frozen, She seems paralyzed, but She is still a giant, and she is everywhere present, and under the rags and underneath the dust that seems to cover Her, She is still the powerful queen that She has always been.

But all that is not Her center. All this is only a consequence. The wonderful social doctrine of the Church -- everything we can do in this state and in politics to bring the realm of Christ to real

brilliance and to power -- all this is a consequence. A consequence that is very important and cannot be belittled if we do not want to destroy society, but it is still a consequence because the call of the Church is not there. The call is a liturgy. The call is the foremost and grandest liturgical act ever. The call is the sacrifice of the cross that is perpetuated on our altars. If we belittle the fact that the drama of the redemption takes place on the most forlorn altar in Gabon in the middle of the jungle every day, if we belittle in our parish churches that what our parish priest does is the most important action that can ever happen in the world, if we do not understand that the great and magnificent apparatus of the Church is all about protecting and promulgating the flame of love that has been sacrificed for us in the Heart of Jesus on the Cross, we have totally misunderstood the Roman Catholic Church. And therefore, we have to go back to a deeper understanding of the Liturgy.

I do not want to hurt any feelings. I have studied with wonderful men in the past that had Catholic theology in their fingertips. The fathers of an order that I do not want to mention, have wonderfully preserved, even at that time, the orthodoxy. But as a young priest, as a young seminarian, I learned nearly nothing about the liturgy. The only thing that I really learned about the liturgy in depth, I may say a little jokingly, was in a half-course, how to purify the chalice in the quickest way. I am not an exception. There are many young priests or not so young, like me now, that have never been introduced to the mystery of the liturgy. And with the many priests, innumerable faithful have not been taught that the most important action of the Church is the liturgical action, is to honor God, is to put God in the middle of all what we do. God comes first. This reality has been totally forgotten. And we know that what has afterwards been called the anthropological change has dethroned God and has centered our attention on poor human nature. All of a sudden the Church, with Her majesty, cannot seem to turn any longer around the mystery of the altar but seems to incline Herself in front of this little slave of sin that is called Man.

It is the great grace that the Church has received in this Pontificate that we have a Pope who has always understood the centrality of the liturgical mystery. I have to say that I am deeply grateful to the founder of the Institute of Christ the King, Msgr. Gilles Wach, that he has always said that we have to go out and proclaim the Faith, but that before we do this, before we take any action, we have to concentrate on what the first task of the priest is -- the liturgy. There is no time, there is no amount of money, there is no energy too precious to foster a more solemn celebration of this first calling, which is the heart of the Church.

If the Church has been subjected to so many heresies in the last forty years, if ever the Church has been subjected to heretical thinking, it is because people have wrongly understood that God acts only on our brain. But God is a God incarnate, and He acts, therefore, as he has shown, in the heart, through the heart, and on our heart. And He does that also in the Church, and the Church has as Her heart the liturgical mystery from which all Her blood, all the pulsations of Her heart, all Her energy comes. If the Devil wanted to destroy the beauty of the handmaid of the Lord, the beauty of Holy Mother Church, he had to attack the liturgy. He had to weaken the heart. He had to undermine the understanding of Catholics that it is more important to be on your knees than to be activists alone. First, you have to be on your knees and then you can be active because God gives you grace for that. If you understand that, then, with our Holy Father, you put emphasis on the celebration of the liturgy.

Therefore, the liturgy is in the first place to be understood as the direction of our whole being toward God. In a few moments I will come back to this, but be assured that it is totally wrong to

believe that the Mass is only for us. The consequences of the Mass are for us because we are poor beings and God knows it, and therefore sacrificed Himself on the cross knowing that the re-establishment of the glory of God would heal this sinful world. But the first step, the first sense of the sacrifice of the cross is to re-establish the glory of the Father. The Second Person of the Holy Trinity came into this world not only to heal a bunch of unrepentant sinners, but in the first place, to re-establish the glory of God and the possibility of Divine Love being poured on these creatures of God that are weak.

So the aim of the first liturgical act, the sacrifice of the cross, is much larger. It is, as a matter of fact, infinite, and it aims toward God and His eternal beauty and glory. And this is true for every Mass. If you assist at a Low Mass where the priest, silently perhaps, says and follows the rubrics, the glorification of God is always the goal and the aim of the celebration of this Mass. The glory of God is present at what the Church does because the good Lord asks her to do it because He has instituted it by His Sacrifice.

Can you imagine what it means if you destroy this universal outlook, this glorification of God, this invocation of His majesty that comes down on our altars, though human banality? Certainly, the call and the validity of the Mass, by the grace of God has not been touched, but if God, over 2,000 years, has taken time and effort and grace to really instruct us in every detail about how He wants to be glorified, how could I, because I have read a few books, believe I could do it better than the Holy Ghost. If I do it I will be rewarded with my own stupidity.

Therefore, the first step we must take, along with the Holy Father, within our own life and existence, is that we recognize this powerful reality of the centrality of the Mass in the life of the Church. And with the Mass, of the whole liturgy, the liturgy of the sacraments, the liturgy of the Divine Office, the liturgy that the whole Church lives from morning to evening, the liturgy that still today is celebrated without end, 24 hours a day throughout the entire globe for the glorification of God. This used to be a uniform liturgy with many beautiful expressions, but it would always incessantly say "holy, holy, holy," with all of its details and expressions throughout the whole world. If you destroy that, if you diminish it, if you touch it, then, the heart of the Church perhaps does not stop beating, but the beats of this heart will be weakened and the energy of the Church, the energy of the proclamation of the truth, the energy to battle the enemy, will get weaker and weaker. And that is what we are witnessing.

So let us be grateful to the Holy Father that he insists that the clergy will rediscover the mystery of the liturgy. If my confrères will allow me to say a word about the clergy.

I do not want to offend the lay people present here. We know that the laity is very much, like us priests, called to holiness. And we know from our own mothers that we would not be here without the laity. And we know we would not have had a wonderful education without the efforts of our parents. We would not be the Church who has kept the Faith of our Fathers if not for the faithful lay people who have brought back the Latin Mass in so many locations, against the will of the clergy. And I thank you for that.

But still, St. Hildegard von Bingen, the great Benedictine, has said, *omni malo ab clero*, all evil comes from the clergy. That means if the clergy is forgetful about the mystery of the Mass, if the clergy does not grasp what the liturgy really means, then this disease will pass over to the lay people and weaken their own dedication and devotion.

Blessed Pope John XXIII, once said that “The devotion of the lay people, if it is authentic, has to be an objective liturgical devotion.” You can have many devotions, as I have, to many saints, but the core of your devotion has to be the Mass, has to be the liturgy. Whatever graces the Holy Ghost gives you to understand it [the liturgy] better, it is your attending daily Mass, Sunday Mass, your presence at the manifold liturgies of the Church that gives more meaning to your own private devotion and the strength you need in this world. And we the clergy have the task and the calling to help you gain an ever deeper devotion and understanding of the centrality of the liturgy.

Specificities of the Traditional Latin Liturgy

Let me therefore come to the second part of my talk. There are specificities of the traditional Latin liturgy that we have to rediscover if a renewal of the liturgy in the Church will be possible. Two so-called specificities of the old rite are also to be found in the so-called *Novus Ordo* if it is celebrated according to the rubrics. The first is Latin, and the second is the direction of the altar.

Ad Orientem

The Holy Father, as perhaps you know, has written a Preface to a book by a very learned member of the London Oratory, Father Michael Lang, who is a very holy priest, about the direction of the altar. And the Holy Father fosters the results of that book. Father Lang has discovered that never was there anything else in the history of the Church other than an eastward-bound altar. And everyone would look toward the same direction together with the priest, toward the east, toward the resurrecting Son—toward Christ—toward the center of the liturgy. Father Lang makes it very clear that any other direction of the altar is not traditional. It is simply a recent introduction. And even if you go through the *Novus Ordo Missae* you will find a few rubrics that indicate that this Mass was meant to be celebrated at an altar facing the tabernacle. So even the new liturgy was not meant to be celebrated exclusively facing the people.

Latin

Latin is still the language of the Church. Personally, I find it embarrassing when the members of the clergy do not understand Latin. It makes them victims of ignorance because if one cannot read and understand Latin, one cannot read and understand the original documents of the Second Vatican Council. One cannot read and understand even most of the Fathers of the Church that have been so widely propagated in the last forty years.

When the clergy would be made national, then all of a sudden, we would not have a Roman Catholic clergy anymore. We would have an American clergy. We would have a German clergy. We would have an Italian clergy. And when they come together, they have no language with which to communicate. This is not the intent of the Church. This has never been the intent of the Church.

The same Pope John XXIII, in the famous encyclical, *Veterum Sapientiae*, during the Council, asked that all clergy be instructed in the Latin language. Just recently, Benedict XVI has again underscored the importance of the Latin language for the Church and for the liturgy.

So if we are for the orientation of the altar toward the tabernacle, and if we want Latin as the language of the Church, we are just doing what the Second Vatican Council wanted, even though the Second Vatican Council is often misrepresented as being against these.

I will give you an important argument to make for the Traditional Latin Mass. The Traditional Latin Mass, from the beginning to the end, was the liturgy of the Second Vatican Council. Not one of the Fathers celebrated any other Mass privately or publicly [during the Council]. And the great liturgies during the Council were the Solemn Papal Masses according to the traditional ritual, every time the Pope was involved.

The liturgy was changed slowly, and with pressure by others, long after the Council was finished. No Father during the Council ever had to see, nor endure what many of us have to endure sometimes today.

With these two points, we are simply going with the direction of the Church of all time. And for the next points, which are much more clearly anchored in the Traditional liturgy, you will see that they also are most important if we want a real and lasting renewal of the liturgy.

The Mass – A Sacrifice

First of all, we have to understand that the Mass is in the first place a sacrifice. I will not linger on that because you all know it. *In primi sacrificium est.* In his famous letter, *Dominicae Cena*, John Paul II said that the Church teaches, as always, that the Eucharist is in the first place a sacrifice. We cannot emphasize this too much. Even the part of the Mass that has the form of a meal -- and I speak of communion (and you know that communion of the people is not necessary for the validity of the Mass) -- even this part of the Mass is clearly a sacrificial banquet. It is not an ordinary meal. Everyone has known, right from the beginning, that this meal is the consequence of the sacrifice that God gives to him in order to strengthen him with the sacrificial fruit of the sacrifice of Christ. The Traditional Latin Mass makes that very clear.

If you have some time, and we don't have that time this evening, go through the prayers of the Offertory and you will see that it is full of allusions and very clear statements about the Mass as a sacrifice: the *oblatio munda*, the pure sacrifice, the *immolatio*, the offering, the sacrifice even of the host that the priest offers to the good Lord, is already called an *oblatio*. It is all about bringing to God a gift to be sacrificed, and the priest at the very end of the Mass says again that he has sacrificed the host for the people. He says "*Placeat tibi, Sancta Trinitas, obsequium servitutis meae, et praesta, ut sacrificium quod oculis tuae Majestatis indignus obtuli, tibi sit acceptabile.*" "Be pleased, Holy Trinity, with the observance of the rite that I have just offered, and grant that this sacrifice that I have offered to Your Majesty unworthily may be acceptable to you."

The fact that the Mass is a sacrifice brings about the glorification of God and the honor of God that is objectively given to God in every valid Mass will be enhanced greatly if the priest knows that he is the priest of the sacrifice; that, accordingly, his life should be a life of sacrifice, and that sacrifice in our own lives is something extraordinarily positive.

The faith that is proclaimed today is a faith of comfort. We have comfort food; we have comfort houses; we have comfort faith. This is a lie. It is a lie because we know that our lives are not comfortable. We know that there is a cross in every life. You can be so successful: you can have a thousand acres in La Jolla, California, you can have a big bank account and a Bentley, you can even be the President of the United States, but you know that somewhere there is the cross that God has prepared for you for your holiness. But if you do not hear about that in the most important celebration of the church, how can you understand it?

Go read in the Old Rite how many times the word sacrifice, offering, oblation, immolation, is used. You will understand that the priest who does not use these words daily anymore, does not understand the sacrifices in his own life. Then you understand why so many priests walk away, why so many priests in the moment of temptation get weak, why so many priests are led astray by a comfort faith that they have to offer to the faithful in the name of what-not. And therefore, try, if you can, to introduce young priests, if not to the actual celebration, at least to the texts of the Old Liturgy and you will see that their priesthood will deepen, as your own faith as lay people will deepen, from the understanding that the sacrifice of the Lord is identically brought about every time that the priest utters the words of the consecration. The sacrificial aspect of the celebration of the Mass has to be once again understood, in order for their to be a renewal of the liturgy, for it to once again become the center of the Church.

Adoration

Another aspect that I want to touch briefly on is adoration. Here I will be very brief. Fortunately in the United States there is a new and wonderful movement to bring back adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. More and more priests expose the Blessed Sacrament, more and more faithful adore the Blessed Sacrament. The traditional liturgy lives from this Adoration. The numerous genuflections in the course of the Mass show how wonderfully the church teaches the adoration of the mystery in the liturgy. I do not know whether you have assisted at the Mass of a very elderly priest when he says the Traditional Latin Mass. Sometimes these priests -- and I will be in this situation some time soon -- have a hard time genuflecting. But isn't it always the witness of a wonderful act of faith to see the old priest grabbing the altar, and making slowly the twentieth genuflection and then getting back up again? This expresses the spirit of adoration. He should be on his face; he should be prostrated, if were possible to be say Mass this way, because *indignus*, unworthily, we say the Mass.

The most beautiful thing happens right after the consecration. When the priest has uttered the words of consecration, the rubrics of the Mass say: "*quibus verbis prolatis, statim Hostiam consecratam genuflexus adorat.*" "When he says the words of the consecration, he," the priest, "will immediately adore the host on his knees." This genuflection has been abolished. It had been there for a thousand years, in order to demonstrate that the consecration and the reality of the real presence is not dependent upon our own faith. It is an immediate reality: from the moment that the words of the consecration are uttered, according to the will of the Church and the commandment of God, God is present. There is no need to show the host to the people in so that they may believe in the presence, in order to make the presence real. The presence is real in spite of our weak faith. And every time a priest, immediately after the consecration, kneels down, we all know that he, like we, witnesses adoringly the real presence of the Lord. We have to bring back this adoration of the presence of the Lord to the liturgy if we want the renewal.

Realism

Then there is something that I want to mention because it touches again upon the priesthood. The Missal that I have the grace to use is very realistic. Sometimes we are accused of the purported fact that the Old Liturgy does not take care of reality: that it is distant from the people, that we do not really know what the situation of the world is, and so on and so forth.

But, first of all, the liturgy knows all about me as a priest. It addresses me all the time as a sinner. Already when I ascend the altar I have to say the Confiteor and I have to beg the forgiveness of the congregation represented by the altar boy. Then, when I ascend the steps of the altar, I say "*Aufer a nobis, quaesumus, Domine, iniquitates nostras, ut ad Sancta sanctorum puris mereamur mentibus introire.*" I ask God to take away my iniquities. And then afterwards, still bowing over the altar, when I kiss it I say, "*Oramus te, Domine, per merita Sanctorum tuorum, quorum reliquiae hic sunt, et omnium Sanctorum ut indulgere digneris omnia peccata mea.*" When I kiss the altar where the relics of the saints are embedded I ask for the forgiveness of my sins before I dare to begin the holy sacrifice of the Mass and go to the side of the Missal to begin the Introit.

I cannot give you all the places where the priest is reminded of his own sinfulness, but this seems to me -- as we know from the recent past -- utterly realistic. The priests are sinners, as we all are. But in comparison with the layman -- and this I quote from a saint -- a priest has not just one private devil; he has about five, who try to bring him to betray the good Lord. Therefore the church always reminds him that he is a sinner, that he needs purification and that he is not worthy to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

But there is another point of realism. This Missal knows about our sorrows. It knows about our needs. The prayers in this Missal -- every single little prayer, the Collect, or the other prayers -- are full of descriptions of our miserable situation. And, furthermore, in an annex to the Mass there are so called "special prayers." You will find there prayers for everything and anything. There are special prayers for those who travel, for those who have died, for those who need rain, for those who need good humor, for those who need tears, for those who are persecuted, for those who need other blessings, for the Pope, for married people, for everyone and everything. And the priest is free to add these prayers in the private Mass every time he is asked to do so, or he himself needs prayers.

This Missal is also a document of the human need. In the first place it is a document of the need of the church for the glorification of God. But the Church, as a good Mother, has never forgotten that the glorification of God brings about the consequences of grace, and She knows about all the needs of us, her poor children. The Church is a realistic Mother and so is the liturgy. If sometimes we hear only about very theoretical social justice issues, this seems to me much less realistic than these down to earth prayers that the Church has developed in centuries.

Heaven

Another point that we need to especially emphasize if we want to bring back a beautiful liturgy and the renewal of the glorification of God in the Church, is Heaven. The liturgy has to reflect Heaven.

Well, ask yourself: does your parish church and her liturgy reflect Heaven? I don't want answers. I can tell you, come to our Seminary, come to our churches [of the Institute of Christ the King] in the United States, go to other Traditional Latin Masses, especially High Mass, and particularly the pontifical High Mass; in these you know that you have a glimpse of Heaven. It is true what St. Jerome said: "He who has never had a foretaste of Heaven will probably not go to Heaven." Well, the Church gives us a foretaste of Heaven. If you go to a small parish church where nothing has been changed and the liturgy is celebrated in a Missa cantata on Sunday with a nice choir that sings Gregorian Chant, there, in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of the jungles of Africa, you have a glimpse of Heaven, a glimpse of something that is so overwhelmingly divine that you understand that God is present.

So many people have been converted simply by being present at the heavenly beauty of the Mass. Among many others the Duke of Oldenburg, who came to a Low Mass at one of our houses and after the Low Mass said: "Now I have to become Catholic." This comes from the fact that every detail in the Mass is not a human invention but an inspiration of the Holy Ghost. That every detail has been shaped into a harmonious unity, and if we change a tittle of it, then we will easily destroy the presence of the beauty that God, from heaven, wants to give us. We have to go back to a worship that is worthy of Heaven, and therefore, every human detail has to be as beautiful as it can.

Hierarchical Order

And finally, if we want a renewal of the liturgy we have to go back to the hierarchical order that the Traditional Latin Mass reflects. I do not know how many of you have ever seen a Pontifical High Mass, but if so, and if it was celebrated according to the full rubrics, you will have seen, at the beginning, that the pontiff is vested at the throne. It is a little lengthy procedure, but I am always astonished how fascinated everyone is to see that the human being who comes into the chapel or church is slowly changed by Holy Mother Church into the sovereign high priest and the representative of Christ. [At the Institute] we have had bishops from the whole world, some pleasantly astonished at what was happening to them; but after the vestition no one could have mistaken the bishop except for what he really is -- a bishop, the representative of Christ, Christ on earth.

The Pontifical High Mass includes the bishop, the presbyter assistens, the deacon, the subdeacon, and all the servers of the minor clergy. They stand on different levels of the sanctuary. This shows you at one glimpse what otherwise has to be explained at length -- that the Church has a gradation of hierarchy, and this hierarchy is instituted by Christ, from the liturgy for the liturgy, to make clear that we need steps, that we need help, that we need support and elevation to come to the sancta sanctorum, [the "holy of holies"], to midst of it all, to the sacrifice and to the presence. If you assist at a beautifully celebrated Solemn High Mass you will come out a changed person because you will have seen the reality of the Church. You will have seen that she is still the beautiful queen. You will have seen that she is still the powerful queen of angels and saints. And you understand why the Church teaches that at these Masses, and at every Mass, the whole heavenly court is present, in gradations, in hierarchies, in the hierarchies of the angels and of the saints that lead to the culminating point -- to the revelation of the Holy Trinity in the presence of Christ.

The liturgy has not been destroyed in her center, but perhaps weakened in her hierarchical expression, and this has been reflected in the perception of the laity. And we cannot be astonished if lay people do not approach a bishop with a notion of his hierarchical station if he is not presented to them as the sovereign high priest during the liturgy.

Renewal Through the Traditional Latin Mass

So, that is what we can learn, and we shall learn, and we will learn if there is a renewal of the liturgy - the Sacrifice, the Adoration, the Realism, the Beauty of Heaven, and the Hierarchy have to come back in the liturgy of the church. And to be frank, I know a solution. We, in the Institute of Christ the King, by the grace of God, live part of this solution in our humble condition, in our frailty, by the gracious permission of the Holy See. We can only hope that the renewal that the Holy Father

wants to bring about is linked to a universal, generous permission of the Traditional Latin Mass to all groups, to all priests who want to say it.

It has already been confirmed by many canonists that the canonical situation seems to be such that every priest can already say the Mass privately. The public Mass will hopefully soon be reinstated at least as an opportunity for everyone.

In the last forty years we have heard so much about liberality, liberty and liberalism. I am for the liberalization of the Traditional Latin Rite. I'm very grateful to the Holy Father that he has brought about this discussion. When I was in the seminary in 1976, speaking about the Latin Mass was a reason to be thanked and showed out the door.

I want to be very optimistic, in the sense of Christian hope. What has happened in the last ten years is a miracle. That many other traditional groups and the Institute of Christ the King are everywhere now, that we have this wonderful church in St. Louis or the wonderful church in Wausau, and everyone can come and worship in the Traditional Latin Rite, would have been unthinkable under other popes. So we want to be very grateful to Pope Benedict XVI and to Pope John Paul II for having opened the door, first a little bit, and now hopefully more.

Well, this talk is taped, but still I want to say that we joke sometimes at table at our community, saying "Well, in thirty years we will all be here, white-haired, and we will say 'The indult will come out any day now'." Well, I hope not. To close this short talk, I can only tell you at least that the document is ready and that the person who is responsible for all of it does not want to discuss it any longer. We have now only to pray that the appropriate time to publish it will be found soon. This will bring about a great strengthening not only of Traditional Latin Mass groups -- it will bring about a renewal of the liturgy, it will bring about a renewal of the clergy, it will bring about a renewal of the beauty of the Church. It will be like seeing your mother all dusty and in rags on the streets; you go up to her and rip off the old dusty clothing and below that you see the golden clothes that she has brought for the most beautiful ball she has ever attended.

And that will be Holy Mother Church with the Traditional Latin Rite liberalized for everyone.