

On the Liturgical Formation of the People of God

The Liturgy: the “today” of salvation history

4. No one had earned a place at that Supper. All had been invited. Or better said: all had been drawn there by the burning desire that Jesus had to eat that Passover with them.
5. everyone is invited to the supper of the wedding of the Lamb...all that is required is the wedding garment of faith ... We must not allow ourselves even a moment of rest, knowing that still not everyone has received an invitation to this Supper or knowing that others have forgotten it or have got lost along the way in the twists and turns of human living. This is what I spoke of when I said, “I dream of a ‘missionary option’, that is, a missionary impulse... so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.” (Evangelii gaudium, n. 27).
6. ...every time we go to Mass, the first reason is that we are drawn there by his desire for us.
7. ...When the Risen One returns from the dead to break the bread for the disciples at Emmaus..., that gesture of breaking the bread opens their eyes. It heals them from the blindness inflicted by the horror of the cross, and it renders them capable of “seeing” the Risen One, of believing in the Resurrection.
8. If we had somehow arrived in Jerusalem after Pentecost...We would have had no other possibility of a true encounter with him other than that of the community that celebrates. For this reason the Church has always protected as its most precious treasure the command of the Lord, ‘Do this in memory of me’.
9. From the very beginning the Church was aware that this was not a question of a representation...— everything of Him had passed into the celebration of the sacraments.
- 10 ...Christian faith is either an encounter with him alive, or it does not exist.

11. The Liturgy guarantees for us the possibility of such an encounter. For us a vague memory of the Last Supper would do no good. We need to be present at that Supper, to be able to hear his voice, to eat his Body and to drink his Blood. We need Him.

The Church: Sacrament of the Body of Christ

14. ...— it was from the side of Christ as He slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth “the wondrous sacrament of the whole Church.”...

16. ...With this letter I simply want to invite the whole Church to rediscover, to safeguard, and to live the truth and power of the Christian celebration. I want the beauty of the Christian celebration and its necessary consequences for the life of the Church not to be spoiled by a superficial and foreshortened understanding of its value or, worse yet, by its being exploited in service of some ideological vision, no matter what the hue.

The Liturgy: antidote for the poison of spiritual worldliness

19 ...The action of the celebration does not belong to the individual but to the Christ-Church, to the totality of the faithful united in Christ. The liturgy does not say “I” but “we,” and any limitation on the breadth of this “we” is always demonic.

22. The continual rediscovery of the beauty of the Liturgy is not the search for a ritual aesthetic which is content by only a careful exterior observance of a rite or is satisfied by a scrupulous observance of the rubrics....

23. Let us be clear here: every aspect of the celebration must be carefully tended to...But even if the quality and the proper action of the celebration was guaranteed, that would not be enough to make the participation full.

Amazement before the Paschal Mystery: an essential part of the liturgical act

24. If there were lacking our astonishment at the fact that the paschal mystery is rendered present in the concreteness of sacramental signs, we would truly risk being impermeable to the ocean of grace that floods every celebration. Efforts to favour a greater quality to the celebration, even if praiseworthy, are not enough; nor is the call for a greater interiority. Interiority can run the risk of reducing itself to an empty subjectivity if it has not taken on board the revelation of the Christian mystery. The encounter with God is not the fruit of an individual interior searching for Him, but it is an event given...

25. ...The astonishment or wonder of which I speak is not some sort of being overcome in the face of an obscure reality or a mysterious rite. It is, on the contrary, marvelling at the fact that the salvific plan of God has been revealed in the paschal deed of Jesus (cf. Eph 1:3-14), and the power of this paschal deed continues to reach us in the celebration of the “mysteries,” of the sacraments...

26. ...Wonder is an essential part of the liturgical act...It is the marvelling of those who experience the power of symbol...

The need for a serious and vital liturgical formation

27. ... how do we recover the capacity to live completely the liturgical action? This was the objective of the Council’s reform. The challenge is extremely demanding because modern people...have lost the capacity to engage with symbolic action, which is an essential trait of the liturgical act.

30. Closing the second session of the Council...Saint Paul VI expressed himself in this way: “The difficult, complex debates have had rich results. They have brought one topic to a conclusion, the sacred liturgy. ... God must hold first place; prayer to him is our first duty. The liturgy is the first source of divine communion in which God shares his own life with us. It is also the first school of the spiritual life.

31. ...If the liturgy is “the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed, and at the same time the font from which all her power flows,” (Sacrosanctum Concilium, n. 10), well then, we can understand what is at stake in the liturgical question. It would be trivial to read the tensions, unfortunately present around the celebration, as a simple divergence between different tastes concerning a particular ritual form. The problematic is primarily ecclesiological. I do not see how it is possible to say that one recognizes the validity of the Council ...and at the same time not accept the liturgical reform born out of Sacrosanctum Concilium, a document that expresses the reality of the Liturgy intimately joined to the vision of Church so admirably described in Lumen gentium. ...I have it my duty to to affirm that “The liturgical books promulgated by Saint Paul VI and Saint John Paul II, in conformity with the decrees of Vatican Council II, are the unique expression of the lex orandi of the Roman Rite.” (Motu Proprio Traditionis custodes, art 1)

The non-acceptance of the liturgical reform, as also a superficial understanding of it, distracts us from the obligation of finding responses to the question that I

come back to repeating: how can we grow in our capacity to live in full the liturgical action? ...We are in need of a serious and dynamic liturgical formation.

36. ...Let us always remember that it is the Church, the Body of Christ, that is the celebrating subject and not just the priest. The kind of knowledge that comes from study is just the first step to be able to enter into the mystery celebrated...

37. ...There is no aspect of ecclesial life that does not find its summit and its source in the Liturgy... a comprehensive, organic, and integrated pastoral practice is the consequence of placing the Sunday Eucharist, the foundation of communion, at the centre of the life of the community. The theological understanding of the Liturgy does not in any way permit that these words be understood to mean to reduce everything to the aspect of worship. A celebration that does not evangelize is not authentic...

41. ...The celebration concerns the reality of our being docile to the action of the Spirit who operates through it until Christ be formed in us. (Cf. Gal 4:19) The full extent of our formation is our conformation to Christ. I repeat: it does not have to do with an abstract mental process, but with becoming Him.

...Leo the Great writes, "Our participation in the Body and Blood of Christ has no other end than to make us become that which we eat." [11]

43. ...The Liturgy gives glory to God because it allows us — here, on earth — to see God in the celebration of the mysteries, and in seeing Him to draw life from his Passover...

44. Guardini writes, "Here there is outlined the first task of the work of liturgical formation: man must become once again capable of symbols." [13] This is a responsibility for all, for ordained ministers and the faithful alike. The task is not easy because modern man has become illiterate, no longer able to read symbols; ...

... To have lost the capacity to grasp the symbolic value of the body and of every creature renders the symbolic language of the Liturgy almost inaccessible to the modern mentality...

45. So, the question I want to pose is how can we become once again capable of symbols?...

46. Above all we must reacquire confidence about creation. I mean to say that things — the sacraments “are made” of things — come from God. To Him they are oriented, and by Him they have been assumed, and assumed in a particular way in the Incarnation, so that they can become instruments of salvation, vehicles of the Spirit, channels of grace. In this it is clear how vast is the distance between this vision and either a materialistic or spiritualistic vision...From the very beginning, created things contain the seed of the sanctifying grace of the sacraments.

Ars Celebrandi

48. One way of caring for and growing in a vital understanding of the symbols of the Liturgy is certainly the *ars celebrandi*, the art of celebrating... The *ars celebrandi* cannot be reduced to only a rubrical mechanism, much less should it be thought of as imaginative — sometimes wild — creativity without rules. The rite is in itself a norm, and the norm is never an end in itself, but it is always at the service of a higher reality that it means to protect.

49. ...The action of the celebration is the place in which, by means of memorial, the Paschal Mystery is made present so that the baptized, through their participation, can experience it in their own lives. Without this understanding, the celebration easily falls into a preoccupation with the exterior (more or less refined) or into a concern only for rubrics (more or less rigid).

Then, it is necessary to know how the Holy Spirit acts in every celebration. The art of celebrating must be in harmony with the action of the Spirit. Only in this way will it be free from the subjectivisms that are the fruit of individual tastes dominating...

51. Speaking of this theme we are inclined to think of it only in regards to ordained ministers carrying out the service of presiding. But in fact this is an attitude that all the baptized are called to live. I think of all the gestures and words that belong to the assembly: gathering, careful walking in procession, being seated, standing, kneeling, singing, being in silence, acclamations, looking, listening. There are many ways in which the assembly, as one body, (Ne 8:1) participates in the celebration...

52. Among the ritual acts that belong to the whole assembly, silence occupies a place of absolute importance...

53. Every gesture and every word contains a precise action that is always new because it meets with an always new moment in our own lives...

54. If it is true that the *ars celebrandi* is required of the entire assembly that celebrates, it is likewise true that ordained ministers must have a very particular concern for it. In visiting Christian communities, I have noticed... different “models” of presiding. Here is a possible list of approaches, which... characterize a way of presiding that is certainly inadequate: rigid austerity or an exasperating creativity, a spiritualizing mysticism or a practical functionalism, a rushed briskness or an overemphasized slowness, a sloppy carelessness or an excessive finickiness, a superabundant friendliness or priestly impassibility. ... these are not the most widespread behaviours, but still, not infrequently assemblies suffer from being thus abused.

57. ...To preside at Eucharist is to be plunged into the furnace of God’s love. When we are given to understand this reality, or even just to intuit something of it, we certainly would no longer need a Directory that would impose the proper behaviour... The highest norm, and therefore the most demanding, is the reality itself of the Eucharistic celebration... It requires application on the part of the priest, an assiduous tending to the fire of the love of the Lord that he came to ignite on the earth. (Lk 12:49).

60. It is the celebration itself that educates the priest to this level and quality of presiding... the priest is educated in humility and contrition... In the Eucharistic prayer — in which also all of the baptized participate...the one presiding has the strength, in the name of the whole holy people, to remember before the Father the offering of his Son in the Last Supper, so that that immense gift might be rendered newly present on the altar. In that offering he participates with the offering of himself. The priest cannot recount the Last Supper to the Father without himself becoming a participant in it. He cannot say, “Take this, all of you and eat of it, for this is my Body which will be given up for you,” and not live the same desire to offer his own body, his own life, for the people entrusted to him. This is what happens in the exercise of his ministry...

61. In this letter I have wanted simply to share some reflections which most certainly do not exhaust the immense treasure of the celebration of the holy mysteries...

...We are called continually to rediscover the richness of the general principles exposed in the first numbers of Sacrosanctum Concilium, grasping the intimate bond between this first of the Council's constitutions and all the others. For this reason we cannot go back to that ritual form which the Council fathers, cum Petro et sub Petro, felt the need to reform, approving, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and following their conscience as pastors, the principles from which was born the reform...

...For this reason I wrote Traditionis custodes, so that the Church may lift up, in the variety of so many languages, one and the same prayer capable of expressing her unity... I intend that this unity be re-established in the whole Church of the Roman Rite.

65. Let us abandon our polemics to listen together to what the Spirit is saying to the Church. Let us safeguard our communion. Let us continue to be astonished at the beauty of the Liturgy..."