

Final Address of Bishop Serratelli to the 2010 National Meeting of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions

The 2010 National Meeting of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions took place in Alexandria, Louisiana from October 5-8. 151 Diocesan liturgists considered the topic Implementing the Third Edition of the Roman Missal: A Gateway to Mystery with the assistance of major presentations by Monsignor Kevin W. Irwin and Rev. Paul Turner. At the meeting, co-sponsored by the USCCB Committee on Divine Worship and the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, the members heard an address by Bishop Arthur Serratelli, Chairman of the Committee on Divine Worship. A large excerpt of Bishop Serratelli's address is presented here for the benefit of our readers:

On April 3, 1969, when Pope Paul VI promulgated the *Missale Romanum*, he said, "No one should think that this revision of the Roman Missal has come out of nowhere. The progress in liturgical studies during the last four centuries has prepared the way." His words ring just as true today. The third edition of the *Roman Missal*, promulgated by Pope John Paul II in the Jubilee Year 2000, and now officially translated into English, has not come from nowhere. It is the flowering of a long liturgical renewal that preceded even the Second Vatican Council.

Some of us who have been around since Vatican II recall the implementation of new Mass after the Council. At times, there was chaos and confusion with the quick implementation of the new Mass. The changes were not always supported and accompanied by appropriate formation. In some places there was little or no catechesis. It took time before many of the faithful finally received an explanation of any given particular change. We should not put blame anywhere. At the time, the resources for the average parish were quite limited. If someone did not have access to a theological library, the information was simply not accessible. Our present situation is different in two ways. First, there is a wealth of information now available on the Internet. Second, there are no significant ritual changes in the liturgy as a result of the third edition, as there were after Vatican II. [...]

It may indeed seem strange today to recall that the rubrics of the 1570 *Roman Missal* made no provision at all for the vocal participation of the people. In the past, the Mass celebrated in Latin by the priest remained unintelligible for the vast majority of the faithful. How far we have come! For many who lived through the turmoil of the first days of renewal, the Mass in Latin is a faded memory and they have whole-heartedly embraced Mass in the vernacular. For some, however, the Mass celebrated in Latin, either in the Ordinary or Extraordinary Form, still remains a vital way to participate in the Eucharist. And here is where we touch upon the key to understand our present

situation on the eve of receiving new texts for the liturgy. That key is the active participation of the laity. Active participation of the laity in the liturgy: this is what I see as the reason why some will readily welcome the new texts and the same reason why others will not.

It is not a well-known fact, but the words “the active participation of the laity” originated not with Vatican II, but with Pope Pius X. With his emphasis on music in the liturgy, he renewed the appreciation of the role of the laity in worship. Pope Pius X urged the active participation of the faithful in the liturgy as the foremost and indispensable font of the true Christian spirit. He saw it as the place where the interior renewal of the Church begins. With *Mediator Dei* in 1947, Pope Pius XII gave a new impetus to liturgical renewal, laying a path that moved toward Vatican II. He moved from a juridical notion of the Church as an institution to a more biblical and dynamic understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ. He reminded us that the Eucharist is at the heart of the Mystical Body; and, he placed a renewed emphasis on the intelligible participation of the laity. It is precisely this idea of more active participation of the laity that has prompted the Church’s publishing a new Missal and its vernacular translations.

Since the first introduction of the vernacular, we have learned a few things. We have learned more about the scriptural and patristic sources of our liturgical texts, more about the vocabulary and its catechetical importance, even more about the very art of translating. Based on this new understanding, *Liturgiam Authenticam* was promulgated in March 2001. It has been a helpful guide in the work on the new translations. The principles are clear and carefully thought out. However, in all fairness, it should be said that, as the principles were being applied, both the translators and the Holy See learned what worked and what did not work. [...]

There has been much healthy discussion before the *recognitio* about structure, syntax, style, and word choice. The discussions had much value. They were not summarily dismissed. They were meaningful discussions and bore good results. And, I might add, the Holy See listened very attentively and responded very positively to what various episcopal conferences said about proposed texts. In the final texts, there has been much collaboration at all levels of church life. Yet, why are some still voicing their dissent?

I would like to offer a suggestion. And once again, I return to the concept of the active participation of the faithful. Put simply, the concept of the active participation of the faithful is not just a liturgical issue. It is a theological issue. It represents a new emphasis in ecclesiology. For liturgy can never be divorced from ecclesiology. However, this new ecclesiological emphasis occurred simultaneously and, in some part, due to a particular sociological understanding of the Church that I see as the real root of some of the opposition to the new texts. [...]

Since the Council, there has been a greater part taken by the laity in planning liturgical celebrations. This is something good. Nonetheless, this sharing in planning liturgies can, if misunderstood, undermined the idea of liturgy as something received from the Church and not created by the local gathering. Before becoming Pope, the then-Cardinal Ratzinger succinctly characterized this misunderstanding of liturgy:

It is not the Church as an integral whole that carries the liturgy of the individual group or parish; rather, the group itself the place of origin for the liturgy... [The liturgy] originates on the spot from the creativity of those gathered.¹

In the period of experimentation after Vatican II, for many, Frank Sinatra’s famous 1969 hit song “My Way” became the crusading song for liturgical renewal. And, so even today, children of the ‘60s who have not grown up will find some difficulty in praying any text as it is written. They want to be free to change, to alter and to insert their own words *ad libitum*, not matter how trite or trivial. This happens too facily when the local group or, worse yet, the local celebrant is placed before the Church as a whole.

Besides this first factor of seeing the liturgy as originating from the gathered assembly, there is also a second sociological factor underlying the hesitancy of some to welcome the new tests. It is the view of the Church as an institution. And, after all, in the view of some, institutions are a negative value.

First and more generally, institutions represent an authority outside the individual. They stand for dominance and they stand against freedom. When the Church is seen merely as institution, liturgy can

¹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *A New Song for the Lord: Faith in Christ and Liturgy Today*; New York: Crossroad, 1996, pg. 143.

become the battleground for freedom and authority. Second and more specifically, the recent scandals that have rocked the Church have exposed the all too human and ugly side of the Church as an institution. The report after report of things that should never have happened has focused our attention too much on the Church-as-institution.

Now the texts have been worked and reworked for 10 years and with countless people involved. Most people realize that there comes a point when a period needs to be put to discussion and implementation must begin. And there is need for the exercise of authority. Those who still continue to voice opposition are really not always speaking about the texts themselves. Rather, they are struggling with what they perceive as the imposition of texts by an authority of a human institution. Commenting on this, the then-Cardinal Ratzinger said:

Is the Church really just an institution, a cultic bureaucracy? [I]f we do not succeed... in seeing the Church differently again from the heart, then the liturgy is not being renewed; on the contrary, the dead are burying the dead and calling it reform.²

The scandal of the Incarnation means that the Son of God has taken to himself our frail nature. Even now through the humanness of the Church, his divine life is communicated to us.

The liturgy cannot be renewed simply by accepting new texts. Rather, there is the need today to rediscover the mystery of the Church. There is need to appropriate the Second Vatican Council's teaching on the Church as the instrument and sign of salvation. The Lord has made the Church his Body. He is contemporaneous to us. In Liturgy, we do not simply remember the past. No, the mystery of our salvation is present to us. This happens because the liturgy is *opus Dei*. By God's grace we enter into God's own life. Thus, liturgy is not fundamentally something we do. But an action, a mystery that we receive, that we remain open to, that we are drawn into. In liturgy, "the *communio sanctorum* of all places and all times" is the subject (*A New Song for the Lord*, p. 149). Liturgy belongs to the whole Church whose proper authority regulates the rites of worship. This understanding does not give great support to the willfulness of any celebrant or group within the Church to do it their way, with their gestures or with their words.

² *A New Song for the Lord*, pg. 148.

Our present texts represent both a diachronic and synchronic actualization of the reality that the liturgy belongs to the whole Church across the centuries and is not the property of one local gathering. On the one hand, the work of unearthing the scriptural and patristic images and vocabulary in the texts place us in continuity with the Church from its origins. On the other hand, the work of translation has been truly collaborative. It has involved so many for the last decade: ICEL, the national episcopal conferences of the English-speaking world, scholars, pastoral ministers, musicians, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, and *Vox Clara*. This collaborative effort has given us texts that truly can belong to the whole Church.

Furthermore, when speaking of liturgical texts, we should widen our discussion even more. Liturgy is, in the words of St. Paul, *logike latreia* (Rom 12:1) or, as Ratzinger puts it, divine worship shaped by the Word.

For "word"... is more than "text," and understanding reaches further than the banal understandability of what is immediately clear to everyone and can be accommodated to the most superficial rationality.³

The Word is first of all not a text, but the living self-communicating of God who becomes incarnate. The liturgical texts, in a sense, are a vehicle, a means to place us face to face before this great mystery of God giving us to himself in the Word. Liturgy—word, action, gesture, silence—is the sacred tent of meeting between us and God (*A New Song for the Lord*, pg. 153).

As we enter this sacred tent, the priest plays a vital role. Thus, the introduction of the next texts will impact most and first the priests. Thus priests need to relearn the prayers and to pay deeper attention to their words. This can be a moment of great personal renewal for the priests and the people. Those who are priests need to understand more deeply their own *ars celebrandi*. This, I think, will be a key element in the welcoming the new prayers. The priest's voice, his gestures, posture, speed in praying, and sense of recollection all matter for a reverent liturgy.

And more than that, priests need to cultivate the right disposition in approaching the altar. But that right disposition can only be formed when the liturgy is understood as mystery. What is most important,

³ *A New Song for the Lord*, pg. 152.

therefore, is theological basis of the *ars celebrandi*. At the ordination of a priest, the paten and chalice are presented to the newly ordained priest with the following words: "Receive the oblation of the holy people, to be offered to God. Understand what you do, imitate what you celebrate, and conform your life to the mystery of the Lord's cross" (*Rites of Ordination*, no. 135).

Chalice and paten symbolizing the Eucharist are handed to the priest. This action reminds us that the liturgy is given to us. It comes to us from a long tradition handed down to us from age to age. To every priest is given the great privilege of celebrating the Eucharist by virtue of his ordination, to lead God's people into the Tent of Meeting, to lead them to encounter the Word made flesh. [...]

Not just priests, but all of us need to cultivate a sense of transcendence, a personal sense of our true position before the Lord. We need to make our own the sentiments of the centurion who said, "Lord, I am not worthy" (Mt 8:8). We also need to stir up the spirit of wonder and awe that is a gift of the Holy Spirit, as we come before a God who stoops to meet us in lowliness.

Finally, our present moment of liturgical renewal is a graced moment for the very mission of the Church. The Church's mission is to evangelize. As Paul VI stated in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, "Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize" (no. 14). For the Church to accomplish this mission that stems from the very activity of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit she herself begins by being evangelized. And how is the Church evangelized? She hears the Word, repents and takes her nourishment from the Bread of life. In a word, she enters into the liturgy.

Liturgy and genuine renewal in the Church cannot be separated. But not all realize this. In response to the next texts, some place a false dichotomy between the liturgy of the Church and her mission. Some even speak of the present attention given to revising our liturgical texts as peripheral or incidental, almost a waste of time in face of the greater issues facing the Church. They talk of the need for the Church to be more interested in social issues as well as the declining attendance at Mass. But the Church's response to the challenges of every generation is never done apart from the liturgy. [...]

Liturgy is the place where the Church herself is uniquely evangelized and becomes the community of believers whose faith is strong, whose hope is lively and whose charity is ardent. Liturgy is the place where the Church is called together again, like the Church in the Cenacle, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. [...]

We have come to an historic moment. After much collaboration on the international, national and diocesan level, with clergy and laity, with experts and the faithful, after hours of discussion and debate, the new texts will be in our hands. In the days ahead, as the discussions and debates recede into the background, we can be united in inspiring each other and laity to receive the new text with enthusiasm. The new translation has the potential, when unlocked through dynamic catechesis, to enrich our people's spiritual lives and lead them to more active participation in the liturgical celebration. And the greater and more effective our liturgical celebration becomes, the more the Church will be energized to her essential work of evangelization of bringing Christ to the world and the world to Christ.

The full text of Bishop Serratelli's address will appear on the Committee on Divine Worship's website.