INTRODUCTION TO THE SPIRIT OF THE LITURGY

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I propose to focus on some topics connected to the spirit of the liturgy and reflect on them with you; indeed, I intend to broach a subject which would require me to say much. Not only because it is a demanding and complex task to talk about the spirit of the liturgy, but also because many important works treating this subject have already been written by authors of unquestionably high caliber in theology and the liturgy. I’m thinking of two people in particular among the many: Romano Guardini and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger.

One the other hand, it is now all the more necessary to speak about the spirit of the liturgy, especially for us members of the sacred priesthood. Moreover, there is an urgent need to reaffirm the “authentic” spirit of the liturgy, such as it is present in the uninterrupted tradition of the Church, and attested, in continuity with the past, in the most recent Magisterial teachings: starting from the second Vatican council up to the present pontificate. I purposefully used the word continuity, a word very dear to our present Holy Father. He has made it the only authoritative criterion whereby one can correctly interpret the life of the Church, and more specifically, the conciliar documents, including all the proposed reforms contained in them. How could it be any different? Can one truly speak of a Church of the past and a Church of the future as if some historical break in the body of the Church had occurred? Could anyone say that the Bride of Christ had lived without the assistance of the Holy Spirit in a particular period of the past, so that its memory should be erased, purposefully forgotten?

Nevertheless at times it seems that some individuals are truly partisan to a way of thinking that is justly and properly defined as an ideology, or rather a preconceived notion applied to the history of the Church which has nothing to do with the true faith.

An example of the fruit produced by that misleading ideology is the recurrent distinction between the pre conciliar and the post conciliar Church. Such a manner of speaking can be legitimate, but only on condition that two Churches are not understood by it: one, the pre Conciliar Church, that has nothing more to say or to give because it has been surpassed, and a second, the post conciliar church, a new reality born from the Council and, by its presumed spirit, not in continuity with its past. This manner of speaking and more so of thinking must not be our own. Apart from being incorrect, it is already superseded and outdated, perhaps understandable from a historical point of view, but nonetheless connected to a season in the church’s life by now concluded.

Does what we have discussed so far with respect to “continuity” have anything to do with the topic we have been asked to treat in this lecture? Yes, absolutely. The authentic spirit of the liturgy does not abide when it is
not approached with serenity, leaving aside all polemics with respect to the recent or remote past. The liturgy cannot and must not be an opportunity for conflict between those who find good only in that which came before us, and those who, on the contrary, almost always find wrong in what came before. The only disposition which permits us to attain the authentic spirit of the liturgy, with joy and true spiritual relish, is to regard both the present and the past liturgy of the Church as one patrimony in continuous development. A spirit, accordingly, which we must receive from the Church and is not a fruit of our own making. A spirit, I add, which leads to what is essential in the liturgy, or, more precisely, to prayer inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit, in whom Christ continues to become present for us today, to burst forth into our lives. Truly, the spirit of the liturgy is the liturgy of the Holy Spirit.

I will not pretend to plumb the depths of the proposed subject matter, nor to treat all the different aspects necessary for a panoramic and comprehensive understanding of the question. I will limit myself by discussing only a few elements essential to the liturgy, specifically with reference to the celebration of the Eucharist, such as the Church proposes them, and in the manner I have learned to deepen my knowledge of them these past two years in service to our Holy Father, Benedict XVI. He is an authentic master of the spirit of the liturgy, whether by his teaching, or by the example he gives in the celebration of the sacred rites.

If, during the course of these reflections on the essence of the liturgy, I will find myself taking note of some behaviours that I do not consider in complete harmony with the authentic spirit of the liturgy, I will do so only as a small contribution to making this spirit stand out all the more in all its beauty and truth.

1. The Sacred Liturgy, God’s great gift to the Church.

We are all well aware how the second Vatican Council dedicated the entirety of its first document to the liturgy: Sacrosanctum Concilium. It was labeled as the Constitution on the sacred liturgy.

I wish to underline the term sacred in its application to the liturgy, because of its importance. As a matter of fact, the council Fathers intended in this way to reinforce the sacred character of the liturgy.

What, then, do we mean by the sacred liturgy? The East would in this case speak of the divine dimension in the Liturgy, or, to be more precise, of that dimension which is not left to the arbitrary will of man, because it is a gift which comes from on high. It refers, in other words, to the mystery of salvation in Christ, entrusted to the Church in order to make it available in every moment and in every place by means of the objective nature of the liturgical and sacramental rites. This is a reality surpassing us, which is to be received as gift, and which must be allowed to transform us. Indeed, the second Vatican Council affirms: “...every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the priest and of His Body which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others...” (Sacrosanctum concilium, n.7)

From this perspective it is not difficult to realise how far distant some modes of conduct are from the authentic spirit of the liturgy. In fact, some individuals have managed to upset the liturgy of the church in various ways under the pretext of a wrongly devised creativity. This was done on the grounds of adapting to the local situation and the needs of the community, thus appropriating the right to remove from, add to, or modify the
liturgical rite in pursuit of subjective and emotional ends. For this, we priests are largely responsible.

For this reason, already back in 2001, the former Cardinal Ratzinger asserted: “There is need of, at the very least, of a new liturgical awareness that might put a stop to the tendency to treat the liturgy as if it were an object open to manipulation. We have reached the point where liturgical groups stitch together the Sunday liturgy on their own authority. The result is certainly the imaginative product of a group of able and skilled individuals. But in this way the space where one may encounter the “totally other” is reduced, in which the holy offers Himself as gift; what I come upon is only the skill of a group of people. It is then that we realise that we are looking for something else. It is too little, and at the same time, something different. The most important thing today is to acquire anew a respect for the liturgy, and an awareness that it is not open to manipulation. To learn once again to recognise in its nature a living creation that grows and has been given as gift, through which we participate in the heavenly liturgy. To renounce seeking in it our own self-realisation in order to see a gift instead. This, I believe, is of primary importance: to overcome the temptation of a despotic behaviour, which conceives the liturgy as an object, the property of man, and to re-awaken the interior sense of the holy.” (from ‘God and the World’; translation from the Italian)

To affirm, therefore, that the liturgy is sacred presupposes the fact that the liturgy does not exist subject to the sporadic modifications and arbitrary inventions of one individual or group. The liturgy is not a closed circle in which we decide to meet, perhaps to encourage one another, to feel we are the protagonists of some feast. The liturgy is God’s summons to his people to be in His presence; it is the advent of God among us; it is God encountering us in this world.

A certain adaptation to particular local situations is foreseen and rightly so. The Missal itself indicates where adaptations may be made in some of its sections, yet only in these and not arbitrarily in others. The reason for this is important and it is good to reassert it: the liturgy is a gift which precedes us, a precious treasure which has been delivered by the age-old prayer of the Church, the place in which the faith has found its form in time and its expression in prayer. It is not made available to us in order to be subjected to our personal interpretation; rather, the liturgy is made available so as to be fully at the disposal of all, yesterday just as today and also tomorrow. “Our time, too,” wrote Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical letter Ecclesia de Eucharistia, “calls for a renewed awareness and appreciation of liturgical norms as a reflection of, and a witness to, the one universal Church made present in every celebration of the Eucharist.” (n. 52)

In the brilliant Encyclical Mediator Dei, which is so often quoted in the constitution on the sacred Liturgy, Pope Pius XII defines the liturgy as “…the public worship... the worship rendered by the Mystical Body of Christ in the entirety of its Head and members.” (n. 20) As if to say, among other things, that in the liturgy, the Church “officially” identifies herself in the mystery of her union with Christ as spouse, and where she “officially” reveals herself. What casual folly it is indeed, to claim for ourselves the right to change in a subjective way the holy signs which time has sifted, through which the Church speaks about herself, her identity and her faith!

The people of God has a right that can never be ignored, in virtue of which, all must be allowed to approach what is not merely the poor fruit of human effort, but the work of God, and precisely because it is God’s work, a saving font of new life.
I wish to prolong my reflection a moment longer on this point, which, I can testify, is very dear to the Holy Father, by sharing with you a passage from Sacramentum Caritatis, the Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness, Benedict XVI, written after the Synod on the Holy Eucharist. “Emphasising the importance of the ars celebrandi,” the Holy Father writes, “also leads to an appreciation of the value of the liturgical norms... The eucharistic celebration is enhanced when priests and liturgical leaders are committed to making known the current liturgical texts and norms... Perhaps we take it for granted that our ecclesial communities already know and appreciate these resources, but this is not always the case. These texts contain riches which have preserved and expressed the faith and experience of the People of God over its two-thousand-year history.” (n. 40)

2. The orientation of liturgical prayer.

Over and above the changes which have characterised, during the course of time, the architecture of churches and the places where the liturgy takes place, one conviction has always remained clear within the Christian community, almost down to the present day. I am referring to praying facing east, a tradition which goes back to the origins of Christianity.

What is understood by “praying facing east”? It refers to the orientation of the praying heart towards Christ, from whom comes salvation, and to whom it is directed as in the beginning so at the end of history. The sun rises in the east, and the sun is a symbol of Christ, the light rising in the Orient. The messianic passage in the Benedictus canticle comes readily to mind: “Through the tender mercy of our God; * whereby the Orient from on high hath visited us”

Very reliable and recent studies have by now proven effectively that, in every age of its past, the Christian community has found the way to express even in the external and visible liturgical sign, this fundamental orientation for the life of faith. This is why we find churches built in such a way that the apse was turned to the east. When such an orientation of the sacred space was no longer possible, the Church had recourse to the Crucifix placed upon the altar, on which everyone could focus. In the same vein many apses were decorated with resplendent representations of the Lord. All were invited to contemplate these images during the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy.

Without recourse to a detailed historical analysis of the development of Christian art, we would like to reaffirm that prayer facing east, more specifically, facing the Lord, is a characteristic expression of the authentic spirit of the liturgy. It is according to this sense that we are invited to turn our hearts to the Lord during the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy, as the introductory dialogue to the Preface well reminds us. Sursum corda “Lift up your hearts,” exhorts the priest, and all respond: Habemus ad Dominum “We lift them up unto the Lord.” Now if such an orientation must always be adopted interiorly by the entire Christian community when it gathers in prayer, it should be possible to find this orientation expressed externally by means of signs as well. The external sign, moreover, cannot but be true, in such a way that through it the correct spiritual attitude is rendered visible.

Hence the reason for the proposal made by the then Cardinal Ratzinger, and presently reaffirmed during the course of his pontificate, to place the Crucifix on the center of the altar, in order that all, during the celebration
of the liturgy, may concretely face and look upon Lord, in such a way as to orient also their prayer and hearts. Let us listen to the words of his Holiness, Benedict XVI, directly, who in the preface to the first book of his Complete Works, dedicated to the liturgy, writes the following: “The idea that the priest and people should stare at one another during prayer was born only in modern Christianity, and is completely alien to the ancient Church. The priest and people most certainly do not pray one to the other, but to the one Lord. Therefore, they stare in the same direction during prayer: either towards the east as a cosmic symbol of the Lord who comes, or, where this is not possible, towards the image of Christ in the apse, towards a crucifix, or simply towards the heavens, as our Lord Himself did in his priestly prayer the night before His Passion (John 17.1) In the meantime the proposal made by me at the end of the chapter treating this question in my work ‘The Spirit of the Liturgy’ is fortunately becoming more and more common: rather than proceeding with further transformations, simply to place the crucifix at the center of the altar, which both priest and the faithful can face and be lead in this way towards the Lord, whom everyone addresses in prayer together.” (trans. from the Italian.)

Let it not be said, moreover, that the image of our Lord crucified obstructs the sight of the faithful from that of the priest, for they are not to look to the celebrant at that point in the liturgy! They are to turn their gaze towards the Lord! In like manner, the presider of the celebration should also be able to turn towards the Lord. The crucifix does not obstruct our view; rather it expands our horizon to see the world of God; the crucifix brings us to meditate on the mystery; it introduces us to the heavens from where the only light capable of making sense of life on this earth comes. Our sight, in truth, would be blinded and obstructed were our eyes to remain fixed on those things that display only man and his works.

In this way one can come to understand why it is still possible today to celebrate the holy Mass upon the old altars, when the particular architectural and artistic features of our churches would advise it. Also in this, the Holy Father gives us an example when he celebrates the holy Eucharist at the ancient altar of the Sistine Chapel on the feast of the Baptism of our Lord.

In our time, the expression “celebrating facing the people” has entered our common vocabulary. If one’s intention in using this expression is to describe the location of the priest, who, due to the fact that today he often finds himself facing the congregation because of the placement of the altar, in this case such an expression is acceptable. Yet such an expression would be categorically unacceptable the moment it comes to express a theological proposition. Theologically speaking, the holy Mass, as a matter of fact, is always addressed to God through Christ our Lord, and it would be a grievous error to imagine that the principal orientation of the sacrificial action is the community. Such an orientation, therefore, of turning towards the Lord must animate the interior participation of each individual during the liturgy. It is likewise equally important that this orientation be quite visible in the liturgical sign as well.

3. Adoration and union with God.

Adoration is the recognition, filled with wonder, we could even say ecstatic, (because it makes us come out of ourselves and our small world) the recognition of the infinite might of God, of His incomprehensible majesty, and of His love without limit which he offers us absolutely gratuitously, of His omnipotent and provident Lordship. Consequently, adoration leads to the reunification of man and creation with God, to the abandonment
of the state of separation, of apparent autonomy, to loss of self, which is, moreover, the only way of regaining oneself.

Before the ineffable beauty of God’s charity, which takes form in the mystery of the Incarnate Word, who for our sake has died and is risen, and which finds its sacramental manifestation in the liturgy, there is nothing left for us but to be left in adoration. “In the paschal event and the Eucharist which makes it present throughout the centuries,” affirms Pope John Paul II in Ecclesia de Eucharistia, “there is a truly enormous capacity which embraces all of history as the recipient of the grace of the redemption. This amazement should always fill the Church assembled for the celebration of the Eucharist.” (n.5)

“My Lord and my God,” we have been taught to say from childhood at the moment of the consecration. In such a way, borrowing the words of the apostle St. Thomas, we are led to adore the Lord, made present and living in the species of the holy Eucharist, uniting ourselves to Him, and recognising Him as our all. From there it becomes possible to resume our daily way, having found the correct order of life, the fundamental criterion whereby to live and to die.

Here is the reason why everything in the liturgical act, through the nobility, the beauty, and the harmony of the exterior sign, must be conducive to adoration, to union with God: this includes the music, the singing, the periods of silence, the manner of proclaiming the Word of the Lord, and the manner of praying, the gestures employed, the liturgical vestments and the sacred vessels and other furnishings, as well as the sacred edifice in its entirety. It is under this perspective that the decision of his Holiness, Benedict XVI, is to be taken into consideration, who, starting from the feast of Corpus Christi last year, has begun to distribute holy Communion to the kneeling faithful directly on the tongue. By the example of this action, the Holy Father invites us to render visible the proper attitude of adoration before the greatness of the mystery of the Eucharistic presence of our Lord. An attitude of adoration which must be fostered all the more when approaching the most holy Eucharist in the other forms permitted today.

I would like to cite once more another passage from the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation Sacramentum caritatis: “During the early phases of the reform, the inherent relationship between Mass and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was not always perceived with sufficient clarity. For example, an objection that was widespread at the time argued that the eucharistic bread was given to us not to be looked at, but to be eaten. In the light of the Church's experience of prayer, however, this was seen to be a false dichotomy. 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)

I think that, among others, the following passage from the text I just read should not go unnoticed: “[The Eucharistic celebration] is itself the Church's supreme act of adoration.” Thanks to the holy Eucharist, his Holiness, Benedict XVI, asserts once more: “The imagery of marriage between God and Israel is now realised
in a way previously inconceivable: it had meant standing in God's presence, but now it becomes union with God through sharing in Jesus' self-gift, sharing in his body and blood.” (Deus Caritas est, n.13) For this reason, everything in the liturgy, and more specifically in the Eucharistic liturgy, must lead to adoration, everything in the unfolding of the rite must help one enter into the Church’s adoration of her Lord.

To consider the liturgy as locus for adoration, for union with God, does not mean to lose sight of the communal dimension in the liturgical celebration, even less to forget the imperative of charity toward one’s neighbour. On the contrary, only through a renewal of the adoration of God in Christ, which takes form in the liturgical act, will an authentic fraternal communion and a new story of charity and love arise, depending on that ability to wonder and act heroically, which only the grace of God can give to our poor hearts. The lives of the saints remind and teach us this. “Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own. Communion draws me out of myself towards him, and thus also towards unity with all Christians.” (Deus caritas est, n. 14)

4. Active Participation.

It was really the saints who have celebrated and lived the liturgical act by participating actively. Holiness, as the result of their lives, is the most beautiful testimony of a participation truthfully active in the liturgy of the Church.

Rightly, then, and by divine providence did the second Vatican Council insist so much on the necessity of promoting an authentic participation on the part of the faithful during the celebration of the holy mysteries, at the same time when it reminded the Church of the universal call to holiness. This authoritative direction from the council has been confirmed and proposed again and again by so many successive documents of the magisterium down to the present day.

Nevertheless, there has not always been a correct understanding of the concept of “active participation”, according to how the Church teaches it and exhorts the faithful to live it. To be sure, there is active participation when, during the course of the liturgical celebration, one fulfills his proper service; there is active participation too when one has a better comprehension of God’s word when it is heard or of the prayers when they are said; there is also active participation when one unites his own voice to that of the others in song....All this, however, would not signify a participation truthfully active if it did not lead to adoration of the mystery of salvation in Christ Jesus, who for our sake died and is risen. This is because only he who adores the mystery, welcoming it into his life, demonstrates that he has comprehended what is being celebrated, and so is truly participating in the grace of the liturgical act.

As confirmation and support for what has just been asserted, let us listen once again to the words of a passage by the then Cardinal Ratzinger, from his fundamental study “The Spirit of the Liturgy”: “What does this 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’...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.” (pp. 171-2) Christ is made present in all of his salvific work, and for this reason the human actio becomes secondary and makes room for the divine actio, to God’s work.

Thus the true action which is carried out in the liturgy is the action of God Himself, his saving work in Christ, in which we participate. This is, among other things, the true novelty of the Christian liturgy with respect to every other act of worship: God Himself acts and accomplishes that which is essential, whilst man is called to open himself to the activity of God, in order to be left transformed. Consequently, the essential aspect of active participation is to overcome the difference between God’s act and our own, that we might become one with Christ. This is why, that I might stress what has been said up to now, it is not possible to participate without adoration. Let us listen to another passage from Sacrosanctum Concilium: “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)

Compared to this, everything else is secondary. I am referring in particular to external actions, granted they be important and necessary, and foreseen above all during the Liturgy of the Word. I mention the external actions because, should they become the essential preoccupation and the liturgy is reduced to a generic act, in that case the authentic spirit of the liturgy has been misunderstood. It follows that an authentic education in the liturgy cannot consist simply in learning and practicing exterior actions, but in an introduction to the essential action, which is God’s own, the paschal mystery of Christ, whom we must allow to meet us, to involve us, to transform us. Let not the mere execution of external gestures be confused with the correct involvement of our bodies in the liturgical act. Without taking anything away from the meaning and importance of the external action which accompanies the interior act, the Liturgy demands a lot more from the human body. It requires, in fact, its total and renewed effort in the daily actions of this life. This is what the Holy Father, Benedict XVI calls “Eucharistic coherence”. Properly speaking, it is the timely and faithful exercise of such a coherence or consistency which is the most authentic expression of participation, even bodily, in the liturgical act, the salvific action of Christ.

I wish to discuss this point further. Are we truly certain that the promotion of an active participation consists in rendering everything to the greatest extent possible immediately comprehensible? May it not be the case that entering into God’s mystery might be facilitated and, sometimes, even better accompanied by that which touches principally the reasons of the heart? Is it not often the case that a disproportionate amount of space is given over to empty and trite speech, forgetting that both dialogue and silence belong in the liturgy, congregational singing and choral music, images, symbols, gestures? Do not, perhaps, also the Latin language, Gregorian chant, and sacred polyphony belong to this manifold language which conducts us to the center of the...
5. Sacred or liturgical music.

There is no doubt that a discussion, in order to introduce itself authentically into the spirit of the liturgy, cannot pass over sacred or liturgical music in silence.

I will limit myself to a brief reflection in way of orienting the discussion. One might wonder why the Church by means of its documents, more or less recent, insists in indicating a certain type of music and singing as particularly consonant with the liturgical celebration. Already at the time of the Council of Trent the Church intervened in the cultural conflict developing at that time, reestablishing the norm whereby music conforming to the sacred text was of primary importance, limiting the use of instruments and pointing to a clear distinction between profane and sacred music. Sacred music, moreover, must never be understood as a purely subjective expression. It is anchored to the biblical or traditional texts which are to be sung during the course of the celebration. More recently, Pope Saint Pius X intervened in an analogous way, seeking to remove operatic singing from the liturgy and selecting Gregorian chant and polyphony from the time of the Catholic reformation as the standard for liturgical music, to be distinguished from religious music in general. The second Vatican Council did naught but reaffirm the same standard, so too the more recent magisterial documents.

Why does the Church insist on proposing certain forms as characteristic of sacred and liturgical music which make them distinct from all other forms of music? Why, also, do Gregorian chant and the classical sacred polyphony turn out to be the forms to be imitated, in light of which liturgical and even popular music should continue to be produced today?

The answer to these questions lies precisely in what we have sought to assert with regard to the spirit of the liturgy. It is properly those forms of music, in their holiness, their goodness, and their universality, which translate in notes, melodies and singing the authentic liturgical spirit: by leading to adoration of the mystery celebrated, by favouring an authentic and integral participation, by helping the listener to capture the sacred and thereby the essential primacy of God acting in Christ, and finally by permitting a musical development that is anchored in the life of the Church and the contemplation of its mystery.

Allow me to quote the then Cardinal Ratzinger one last time: “Gandhi highlights three vital spaces in the cosmos, and demonstrates how each one of them communicates even its own mode of being. Fish live in the sea and are silent. Terrestrial animals cry out, but the birds, whose vital space is the heavens, sing. Silence is proper to the sea, crying out to the earth, and singing to the heavens. Man, however, participates in all three: he bares within him the depth of the sea, the weight of the earth, and the height of the heavens; this is why all three modes of being belong to him: silence, crying out, and song. Today...we see that, devoid of transcendence, all that is left to man is to cry out, because he wishes to be only earth and seeks to turn into earth even the heavens and the depth of the sea. The true liturgy, the liturgy of the communion of saints, restores to him the fullness of his being. It teaches him anew how to be silent and how to sing, opening to him the profundity of the sea and teaching him how to fly, the nature of an angel; elevating his heart, it makes that song resonate in him once again which had in a way fallen asleep. In fact, we can even say that the true liturgy is recognisable especially
when it frees us from the common way of living, and restores to us depth and height, silence and song. The true liturgy is recognisable by the fact that it is cosmic, not custom made for a group. It sings with the angels. It remains silent with the profound depth of the universe in waiting. And in this way it redeems the world.” (trans. from the Italian.)

At this point I would like to conclude the discussion. For some years now, several voices have been heard within Church circles talking about the necessity of a new liturgical renewal. Of a movement, in some ways analogous to the one which formed the basis for the reform promoted by the second Vatican Council, capable of operating a reform of the reform, or rather, one more step ahead in understanding the authentic spirit of the liturgy and of its celebration; its goal would be to carry on that providential reform of the liturgy that the conciliar Fathers had launched but has not always, in its practical implementation, found a timely and happy fulfillment.

There is no doubt that in this new liturgical renewal it is we priests who are to recover a decisive role. With the help of our Lord and the Blessed Virgin Mary, mother of all priests, may this further development of the reform also be the fruit of our sincere love for the liturgy, in fidelity to the Church and the Holy Father.

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