

*IN CELEBRATION OF THE YEAR OF FAITH
October 11, 2012 – November 24, 2013*

*AT THE CATHEDRAL PARISH OF SAINT RAPHAEL
in Madison, Wisconsin*

This Year of Faith occurs on the fiftieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. The Year of Faith commemorates that Council, and comes with an invitation to revisit the documents produced by Vatican II so we may better understand the authentic teaching of that Council and put it into practice.

**CONSTITUTION ON THE SACRED LITURGY
(*SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM*)**

***SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM I –
WHAT VATICAN II DIDN'T SAY***

Sacrosanctum Concilium is the probably the most controverted of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, and also the document of which we Catholics have the most direct and extensive experience. By virtue of coming to Mass on Sunday, we have experienced the fruit of this document in the life of the Church.

I'd like to begin my homilies on *Sacrosanctum Concilium* by talking about some things that the document does *not* say, although it has sometimes been thought to have said them.

I can begin with a very personal story in that vein. Some years ago, I was visiting relatives for some occasion at which I was going to concelebrate Mass – I don't recall if it was a Confirmation or a parochial school graduation or what.

Anyway, we were in their parish church where the liturgy was going to take place. In this church, new carpeting had recently been installed. This particular carpeting had been laid in the aisles of the nave, up into the sanctuary, and up the steps at the very front of the church to the pedestal where the tabernacle was located.

I commented on the fact that the carpet was new, and one of little cousins confided to me with childlike innocence that the pope had said that the same carpet had to be in the aisles as in the sanctuary.

Well . . . maybe the pope didn't say that! But the attitude behind that comment – that they had heard from somebody – was that the distinction between the nave of the church and the sanctuary should be downplayed. And this is the first “myth,” if you will, ascribed to the Second Vatican Council that I'd like to mention.

The myth is that since Vatican II taught that Christ is present in the assembly of the people, the distinction between the priest and assembly, the sanctuary and the nave should be removed . . . and that piety toward the Eucharistic species – the Body and Blood of Christ – should be diminished. This because Christ is really very, very present – maybe even most present – in the people praying together.

Well, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* did not really say that or have that intention.

A. Focus on the assembly

Myth: “*Vatican II stressed that Christ is present in the assembly. It wanted to remove the distinction between priest and people and to diminish piety toward the Eucharistic species.*”

To accomplish so great a work, Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister, "the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross," but especially under the Eucharistic species. . . . He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matt. 18:20). (SC, 7)

The effort to subordinate the presence of Christ in the priest to His presence in the assembly is not something I've only encountered in talking to my little cousins.

A priest with whom I had been assigned (as fellow Associate) was transferred some years ago to another parish where he was again one of two Associates.

He told me how – at that next assignment – he and his fellow Associate were engaged in the “Battle of the Presider's Chair.” The “Presider's Chair,” you know, is the chair the priest uses during the First Reading of the Mass, and after Communion (for instance) when he sits down.

Well, the other Associate wanted to obscure that distinction between the priest and the assembly. So every time he celebrated Mass in the parish church, he insisted that the Presider's Chair be removed so that he could sit in the first pew – or maybe even the second – among the congregation. And then, every time my friend offered Mass, he ordered the Presider's Chair brought back – so that he could use it as the rubrics suggest.

The “Battle of the Presider's Chair” – probably not a very edifying example to give to the People of God. But it was really a battle over *Sacrosanctum Concilium* – whether this Vatican II document called for the presence of Christ in the priest to be confused with – or submerged into – the presence of Christ in the assembly. Clearly that wasn't the intention of the document.

Myth: “Vatican II called for us to regard the Mass as a meal rather than a sacrifice.”

At the Last Supper, on the night when He was betrayed, our Savior instituted the eucharistic sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is eaten, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us. (SC, 47)

Myth: “Vatican II was all about “active participation” – more people being able to do more things that had previously been reserved to the priest.”

With zeal and patience, pastors of souls must promote the liturgical instruction of the faithful, and also their active participation in the liturgy both internally and externally, taking into account their age and condition, their way of life, and standard of religious culture. (SC, 19)

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. (SC, 48)

Myth: “The liturgy is the work of the people. It must express who we are and address our concerns.”

Rightly, then, the liturgy is considered as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. In the liturgy the sanctification of the man is signified by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which corresponds with each of these signs; in the liturgy the whole public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and His members. From this it follows that 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; no other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree. (SC, 7)

Myth: “Vatican II said that the liturgy should be celebrated in a way that speaks to the local community. The bishop has no right to impose his tastes on a local parish.”

Liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations of the Church, which is the "sacrament of unity," namely, the holy people united and ordered under their bishops. (SC, 26)

The bishop is to be considered as the high priest of his flock, from whom the life in Christ of his faithful is in some way derived and dependent. Therefore all should hold in great esteem the liturgical life of the diocese centered around the bishop, especially in his cathedral church; they must be convinced that the pre-eminent manifestation of the Church consists in the full active participation of all God's holy people in these liturgical celebrations, especially in the same eucharist, in a single prayer, at one altar, at which there presides the bishop surrounded by his college of priests and by his ministers. (SC, 41)

And therefore the liturgical life of the parish and its relationship to the bishop must be fostered theoretically and practically among the faithful and clergy; efforts also must be made to encourage a sense of community within the parish, above all in the common celebration of the Sunday Mass. (SC, 42)

B. Practical issues

Myth: “Vatican II encouraged priests to be spontaneous in varying the Mass prayers, and liturgy committees to be creative in planning Masses.”

1. Regulation of the sacred liturgy depends solely on the authority of the Church, that is, on the Apostolic See and, as laws may determine, on the bishop.
2. In virtue of power conceded by the law, the regulation of the liturgy within certain defined limits belongs also to various kinds of competent territorial bodies of bishops legitimately established.
3. Therefore no other person, even if he be a priest, may add, remove, or change anything in the liturgy on his own authority. (SC, 22)

Myth: “Vatican II permitted non-scriptural readings to be used in place of Sacred Scripture – especially passages from *The Giving Tree* and *The Velveteen Rabbit*.”

Sacred scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy. For it is from scripture that lessons are read and explained in the homily, and psalms are sung; the prayers, collects, and liturgical songs are scriptural in their inspiration and their force, and it is from the scriptures that actions and signs derive their meaning. Thus to achieve the restoration, progress, and adaptation of the sacred liturgy, it is essential to promote that warm and living love for scripture to which the venerable tradition of both eastern and western rites gives testimony. (SC, 24)

Myth: “Vatican II discouraged the use of Latin in the Mass.”

Particular law remaining in force, the use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rites. (SC, 36)

Nevertheless steps should be taken so that the faithful may also be able to say or to sing together in Latin those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them. (SC, 54)

Myth: “Vatican II encouraged the replacement of Latin chants and organ music with music that speaks to the taste of contemporary people. Any musical style that people like may be used in the liturgy.”

The Church acknowledges Gregorian chant as specially suited to the Roman liturgy: therefore, other things being equal, it should be given pride of place in liturgical services. But other kinds of sacred music, especially polyphony, are by no means excluded from liturgical celebrations, so long as they accord with the spirit of the liturgical action, as laid down in Art. 30. (SC, 116)

In the Latin Church the pipe organ is to be held in high esteem, for it is the traditional musical instrument which adds a wonderful splendor to the Church's ceremonies and powerfully lifts up man's mind to God and to higher things. But other instruments also may be admitted for use in divine worship, with the knowledge and consent of the competent territorial authority, as laid down in Art. 22, 52, 37, and 40. This may be done, however, only on condition that the

instruments are suitable, or can be made suitable, for sacred use, accord with the dignity of the temple, and truly contribute to the edification of the faithful. (SC, 120)

Myth: “Vatican II called for statues to be removed from churches so that they would not distract us from the action of the Mass.”

The practice of placing sacred images in churches so that they may be venerated by the faithful is to be maintained. Nevertheless their number should be moderate and their relative positions should reflect right order. For otherwise they may create confusion among the Christian people and foster devotion of doubtful orthodoxy. (SC, 125)

Myth: “Vatican II discouraged devotions.”

Popular devotions of the Christian people are to be highly commended, provided they accord with the laws and norms of the Church, above all when they are ordered by the Apostolic See. Devotions proper to individual Churches also have a special dignity if they are undertaken by mandate of the bishops according to customs or books lawfully approved. But these devotions should be so drawn up that they harmonize with the liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some fashion derived from it, and lead the people to it, since, in fact, the liturgy by its very nature far surpasses any of them. (SC, 13)