

*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 II – LITURGY AS DIALOGUE

Last week, I talked about some of the liturgical myths associated with Vatican II and the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy – things that people have thought the Council said, which it really didn't.

This week, I'd like to take a more positive approach by looking at what the Council was trying to do – or at least one perspective on that.

This is not going to be a thorough exposition of everything that *Sacrosanctum Concilium* had to say.

The document actually talks about the liturgical celebration of all the Sacraments, and also treats the Divine Office – we're not going to get to any of that.

I'm just going to try to describe one perspective that is present in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* – but it's one that I find interesting and helpful, and I hope you will too.

***Dei Verbum* and Dialogue**

The first document of Vatican II that we talked about a year ago was the Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*.

One of the most important points in that document was the definition of faith. Remember? *Dei Verbum* began by talking about the initiative that God has taken to make Himself known. This is called Revelation. Our positive response to that initiative is faith. God has acted first to make Himself known, my “yes” to that is faith – “Yes, Lord, I believe and I trust.”

So Revelation and Faith form a certain dialogue: God speaks, and we respond.

In *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, we find a kind of dialogue described in regard to the liturgy as well.

In the first place, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* says that the Eucharist renews the our covenant with God – that is, the “New Covenant” that God has made with us through His Divine Son. A covenant is always a dialogue of sorts; it brings two parties together.

Then, further, in the Eucharist, it is the Lord God who is taking the initiative to act – just as in Revelation. And that action of God is described in a very beautiful way. Here are the words of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*:

... [T]he renewal in the Eucharist of the covenant between the Lord and man draws the faithful into the compelling love of Christ and sets them on fire. From . . . the Eucharist, as from a font, grace is poured forth upon us; and the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God, to which all other activities of the Church are directed as toward their end, is achieved in the most efficacious possible way. (SC 10)

So Christ pours out sanctifying grace upon us in the Eucharist. His action is primary. But then, the very next paragraph of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* says this:

But in order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds should be attuned to their voices, and that they should cooperate with divine grace lest they receive it in vain. Pastors of souls must therefore realize that, when the liturgy is celebrated, something more is required than the mere observation of the laws governing valid and licit celebration; it is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects. (SC 11)

This is the very important principle of *participatio actuosa* that we talked about last week – active participation, which doesn't primarily mean performing liturgical functions, but rather an intentional, interior engagement with what is happening.

But the point I want to make now is that this interior participation is our response, which is a necessary part of the dialogue that is meant to take place.

Christ is objectively present in the Eucharist – most perfectly in the consecrated elements that have become the Body and Blood of Christ. That is the first word of the dialogue.

But the second moment of the dialogue is my response – precisely my response of faith. If I am going to benefit from the grace of Christ present in the Eucharist, I must come with ears open to what He will say, and a willingness to say “yes” to that. I must come with the eyes of faith to see Him present, and to say as Thomas the Apostle did (one week after the Resurrection), “My Lord and My God.”

The Woman Healed of the Hemorrhage

One place that the necessity of this dialogue is very beautifully but subtly expressed is in an artistic detail of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

You probably know that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was not produced at the time of the Council – we had to wait thirty years for it to be published. But it is the Catechism “of the Council,” drawing from its documents as well as from all the prior tradition of the Church.

This Catechism has four great parts: on (1) the Creed, (2) the Sacraments, (3) Moral Life and (4) Prayer. In the large format edition of the Catechism, each section is introduced with a work of art.

For Part II, on the Sacraments, the picture is a 4th century fresco of the healing of the woman who had suffered for many years with a hemorrhage and was healed by touching the hem of the Lord’s garment.

What’s the significance of that scene for the Sacraments? Why didn’t the editors use a nice depiction of the Last Supper instead?

In that story in the Gospel (of the healing of the woman with the hemorrhage), there are all kinds of people “touching” Jesus – he’s in a crowd (on his way to perform another miracle) and he’s being jostled from all sides. But when this woman touches him – very intentionally and with faith – he feels power go out from him, and he looks around to see who it is.

This is a beautiful metaphor for the liturgy. In that moment 2000 years ago, Christ was present and full of divine power, but that power only had a healing effect on the one person who approached him with faith.

The woman’s faith did not create the power, for sure; but it was her faith that

disposed her to receive it. Faith is not the cause of grace. Grace comes from God. But faith is the condition for receiving grace.

The liturgy is meant to heal us; and (as that passage from *Sacrosanctum Concilium* that I cited earlier said) to set us on fire with Divine Life. Christ is really present in the liturgy with the power to do that; He takes the initiative toward us through the words and actions of the Eucharist; but we must come with faith ready to say “yes” and to accept if we are to benefit as we should.

It is our response of faith that completes the dialogue, and disposes us to receive the grace that the Lord is pouring out.

Practical Reforms of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*

And this brings us back to the concrete reform of the liturgy at the Second Vatican Council. One of the principal goals of that reform was that the words and actions of the liturgy might speak to us more clearly.

With regard to the words of the Mass, this was the principal motivation for translating the Mass from Latin into the modern languages.

Translation is nothing new in the life of the Church:

- The Lord had spoken Aramaic, but His words were translated into a Greek version for the Gospels, so that they could be read and understood through the whole world.
- After a few centuries, the Bible and the liturgy were translated again, from Greek into Latin, because that had become the most commonly understood language.
- The next step is the translation from Latin to the modern languages.

In all candor, this probably would have happened much more quickly (after the modern European languages had developed into standardized

form) if it hadn't been for the Reformation. There were thirty translations of the Bible into German (done by Catholics) before Luther's – so that process of moving to the modern European languages was underway. But when Luther and others *insisted* on the translation of the liturgy, the Church *forbade* it.

Early Jesuit missionaries to China petitioned that they be allowed to translate the liturgy into Chinese, but the memory of the Reformation was too fresh. If the Church hadn't been reacting to the Reformation, the translation of the liturgy would probably have happened much sooner. But that's the way things happen.

But at any rate, by the time of the Second Vatican Council, it was clear that the readings should be in the vernacular.

Before the Council, there were two readings, read by the priest in Latin, facing the altar – and not necessarily audible. Now the sacrifice of the Mass is offered to the Father, for sure. The readings are part of that whole action . . . but the readings are not addressed to God. They are the message of God to us – and so it was clear that the readings, first of all, should be audible and proclaimed in a language the people could understand.

There is a lovely detail about the readings in the Latin Mass – if the church building is oriented toward the east, the Epistle is read toward the south end of the altar, and the Gospel toward the north. So the Epistles were letters written to those who were already believers, while the Gospel had to be preached to the heathens. The Mediterranean world, to the south, became Christian first – so that's where the Epistle was read. The heathens were further north – running around in animal skins in the forests of Germany, so that's where the Gospel had to be proclaimed.

I love that little detail from the Tridentine Mass. But you know, that little factoid will not save anyone. It's possible to have a great aesthetic appreciation of the Tridentine Mass, and to have a lot of esoteric knowledge about it . . . but that doesn't really make someone a Christian.

And, in the mind of the Council, it was not just the readings (addressed to us) that could profitably be translated. So also the prayers that are addressed to God.

Here is what *Sacrosanctum Concilium* says:

Although the sacred liturgy is above all things the worship of the divine Majesty, it likewise contains much instruction for the faithful. For in the liturgy God speaks to His people and Christ is still proclaiming His gospel. And the people reply to God both by song and prayer. Moreover, the prayers addressed to God by the priest who presides over the assembly in the person of Christ are said in the name of the entire holy people and of all present. And the visible signs used by the liturgy to signify invisible divine things have been chosen by Christ or the Church. Thus not only when things are read "which were written for our instruction" (Rom. 15:4), but also when the Church prays or sings or acts, the faith of those taking part is nourished and their minds are raised to God, so that they may offer Him their rational service and more abundantly receive His grace. (SC, 33)

The people are meant to associate themselves with the prayers that are addressed to God. Only the priest says the words (of many of the prayers) aloud, but those words that go up in the voice of the priest are meant to go up from the hearts of all the faithful.

Before certain of the prayers of the Mass, the priest says, "Let us pray." Not, "Let me pray for you." The people, too, are meant to be offering those prayers with the affirmation of their hearts.

One of the small adjustments made when the new translation of the Missal was published (two years ago now) is that you stand up a bit sooner after the offertory prayers. What was that about? You stand up in time for the "Prayer over the Gifts" because those are words that you also are meant to be addressing to the Father from your heart. You stand as a sign that you are associating yourself with those words that the priest (who is standing to pray) is saying.

So even though those words are the other side of the dialogue, going from us to God, it is appropriate that we understand those words, which we are also meant to be making our own.

This is not inconsistent with retaining the use of Latin in the Mass – especially for the Ordinary, i.e., the unchanging parts. Precisely because

they are unchanging! When it comes time for the “Holy, Holy,” every Catholic over ten years old knows what words are going to be sung. We can learn the words in Latin and sing them with an engagement of our minds and hearts even if we don’t know Latin because we have long known what those words are saying.

And finally, the actions of the Mass as well.

The Council called for them to be simplified – not so that they might be impoverished, but with the intention that by eliminating excessive repetition, the more important gestures might stand out more clearly.

And that those gestures might be vivid enough so that they “speak for themselves.”

Here is *Sacrosanctum Concilium* on this point:

The rites should be distinguished by a noble simplicity; they should be short, clear, and unencumbered by useless repetitions; they should be within the people's powers of comprehension, and normally should not require much explanation. (SC, 34)

The rite of the Mass is to be revised in such a way that the intrinsic nature and purpose of its several parts, as also the connection between them, may be more clearly manifested, and that devout and active participation by the faithful may be more easily achieved. For this purpose the rites are to be simplified, due care being taken to preserve their substance; elements which, with the passage of time, came to be duplicated, or were added with but little advantage, are now to be discarded; other elements which have suffered injury through accidents of history are now to be restored to the vigor which they had in the days of the holy Fathers, as may seem useful or necessary. (SC, 50)

This was not an entirely novel idea at the time of the Council. At the beginning of the 20th century, Pius X had called for “clearing away the marks of old age” in the liturgy.

In regard to the gestures of the liturgy “speaking for themselves,” I have a little Bishop Morlino anecdote. We were talking recently about sprinkling with holy water (– I don’t recall why). But the Bishop was saying that in an earlier time, the preferred manner of using the aspergelium was to bend the wrist two or three time toward the persons or objects to be blessed.

Now if you were in church and saw the priest doing that 50 yards away from you, you could be reminded of your Baptism – if you knew what an aspergelium was, and realized that a few drops of water were probably coming out of it. But your prior knowledge of what was happening had to “supply” the water (in a sense) – you couldn’t really see water. But if you knew it was there, you could perhaps make the connection to Baptism.

Anyone who has ever experienced Bishop Morlino’s asperges knows that it “speaks for itself.” You don’t need to conjure up an image of water in your mind – it’s there for all to see. Bishop really does the asperges in the “spirit of Vatican II.”

In the Tridentine Mass, the priest made sixteen genuflections; in the current Mass, only five. Some will argue that the more genuflections better indicated the holiness of what was happening. But the intent of the Council was that fewer genuflections should make their meaning more evident.

The priest genuflects when entering and leaving the sanctuary, and then three times to the Eucharist: after the Consecration of the hosts; after the Consecration of the Precious Blood, and just before he receives Holy Communion. Those three genuflections, done deliberately and with devotion, can speak more clearly than sixteen.

But the larger point is this: we should understand the words and the gestures because they point to what the Lord has done in history, and to what he is doing in mystery in the celebration of the liturgy.

That is the first moment in a dialogue – that we hear the words that the Lord addresses to us, and see gestures that effectively remind us of his saving work.

The second moment of the dialogue is our response in faith:

“Yes, I want to hear what the Lord has to say to me and to act on it.”

“Yes, I want what he has done to affect me.”

“Yes, I want to have his mind and his heart.”

“Yes, I want to do again what he has done – to follow in his steps.”

As we celebrate the Eucharist today, we ask the Lord that each time we come to Mass, we may come with the eyes and ears of faith that allows us to enter into that dialogue – that we may say “yes” to Him receive fruitfully the grace that He is pouring forth in the Sacred Mysteries.