



VATICAN - THE WORDS OF DOCTRINE Rev Nicola Bux and Rev Salvatore Vitiello - "The Liturgy, the Church in total relationship with Jesus Christ Mediator Dei"

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - It is known that the incipit of the Encyclical of the Servant of God Pope Pius XII is the most organic pronouncement of the Magisterium of the Church on the Liturgy which has ever been produced. The Constitution on the Liturgy of Vatican II itself is founded on the Encyclical's doctrinal principles, following and developing its structure. What is so surprising when one reads a document written sixty years ago is to realise its relevance still for today: it stems from pastoral intention and opens the path for 'liturgical pastoral', as demonstrated by the "instaurations" or reforms which followed in the following decade, the most famous was the Order of Holy Week (1955), inaugurated in 1951 with the restoration of the Easter Vigil and its original character.

Pastoral concern is also documented in the method: it does not suddenly impose an arrangement which upsets the system of 'liturgical unity' (Mass, Office, Calendar...), but proposes a gradual restoration of the oldest parts, without however eliminating the developments, since the Liturgy like the ecclesial body is a living organism: parts cannot be amputated simply because they were not their at birth. Something like the method applied to works of art. Certain studies shed light on the principles which guided that great Pontiff: especially the principle of innovation in continuity, very different from archaeologism and creativism (Cfr in specie: C.Braga, *La riforma liturgica di Pio XII. Documenti-1. La 'Memoria sulla riforma liturgica'*, Roma 2003, CLV, BEL 128; N.Giampietro, *Il Card.Ferdinando Antonelli e gli sviluppi della riforma liturgica dal 1948 al 1970*, SA, Roma 1978.). John XXIII and Paul VI intended to continue the path and method of Pius XII, as it is seen from the 1962 and 1965 editions of the Missal. Now this Motu proprio by Benedict XVI re-connects with that traditional arrangement and an innovative time.

Well known is Dostoevsky's statement in "Brothers Karamazov": "If someone could show me truth which is found outside of Christ, I would prefer to remain with Christ rather than with that truth". Probably not theologically correct, but it expresses the essential for a Christian: the implacability between the Church and the world, as between salt and the dish to which it must give taste. The world may accept the tradition, thought, art, values of Christianity and perhaps even the moral example of Christ: but the spirit of the world will never allow itself to be possessed by the spirit of Christ since it aspires continually to autonomy. Whereas the Church is totally relative to Christ: and if she sought not to be, she would no longer be the Church.

The Church's worship or liturgy manifests this relation totally, as the Encyclical *Mediator Dei* affirms in capite. Otherwise something similar to Christian worship, but without Christ, is created. Either worship far from the glory to give to God and from the salvation to give to man, concerned with celebrating itself, the community, the priest, or worship confined to an evanescent 'spiritual' dimension, in which awareness and experience are sacrificed, in exchange for solely aesthetic satisfaction. In both cases we have the rejection of the essential method of Christianity, that of a communion to adhere to and to obey, which is the necessary presupposition for man to approach and then participate in worship.

One of the Italian bishops most attentive to the Liturgy, writes among other things: "Pelagianism, in its various gradations, is always a danger for the life of the Church (even when Grace is hardly mentioned, even when almost nothing is known of the contents in which it was born and had its acute manifestation). If the Pelagian mentality is applied to the Liturgy, more importance and emphasis is given to the exterior action performed by man than that which Christ performs through the instrumental ministerial action by the person whom He enabled to act 'in persona Christi et Ecclesiae', through the Word which is announced, the signs performed. We come to forget that what counts is the divine action of the Spirit, of Grace, not that of man, whether he be the individual believer, the community or the Minister himself" (Mons. Mario Oliveri, *La Divina Liturgia*, Albenga 2007, p 7) .

The presumption of creating a new liturgy and the existential and cultural weakness of the Church, helped to create a climate in which abuses, signs of rebellion and disobedience took root, so opposite to the obedience of Christ, even to death on the cross whom the Liturgy should essentially announce. So that, as someone said, those who should have come into the Church with the liturgical reform, remained outside. We do not know what will happen in the future, but we Christians have the responsibility to witness that nihilism and relativism which have penetrated the liturgy cannot win, they have been already defeated by the One who continually “makes all things new”(Rev 21,5).

If all this had been taken more into consideration with the implementation of the post-council liturgical reform, we would have avoided traumas and contrapositions. Now a season opens in which there must prevail frank and calm discussion of ideas, because no one alone represents the whole Church, except the Bishop of Rome; not lacking must be assistance from worthy liturgical institutions, in primis those guided by the Benedictines, under the guidance of the Congregation for Divine Worship, supreme moderating authority of the liturgy “to preserve or obtain reconciliation and unity” (Letter Benedict XVI to Bishops to accompany the Motu proprio Summorum Pontificum). (Agenzia Fides 6/12/2007; righe 61, parole 882)