



## **VATICAN - THE STONES, SOUNDS AND COLOURS OF GOD'S HOUSE by Bishop Mauro Piacenza - The centre of our liturgical space and the heart of human sacrality: the Sanctuary and the Crucifix (I)**

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - 1. The liturgical space of the church expresses an ecclesiology, it corresponds with the Church's theological understanding of itself. In fact in the history of the Church the liturgical space has not always been the same.

For example in the second half of the 19th the shape of the liturgical space was almost the same everywhere: the high altar against the rear placed upon it the tabernacle; two side altars against the side walls of the nave, and sanctuary was separated from the central nave by the altar rails for Holy Communion. The unitary idea, underlining the hierarchical structure of the Church has produced a uniform model of the church building. Attention given to certain aspects of the Christian faith influenced the liturgy and liturgical architecture. For example in the Baroque epoch many churches were built providentially in view of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament according to a plan which we might call "throne hall", to allow adoration of the Eucharist, preserved in the tabernacle the focal point of the whole building. This plan differed from that of the basilica which had naves which do not allow vision of the tabernacle from all over the church. This was not because when the basilicas were built consideration of the Eucharist was less, but rather because following the Council of Trent it became pastorally necessary to give importance to devotion to the Eucharist outside of Mass because of greater awareness in the Church of a growing devotion among Christians since the Middle Ages and the querying on the part of Protestants of the real Presence of Christ in the Mass and afterwards in the preserved Species. Certainly the Holy Spirit guided in this sense and the bishops were docile tools for authentic progress.

2. Today the liturgy and church architecture must consider the teaching of the Second Vatican Council II (1962-1965), which dealt with ecclesiology and promulgated a liturgical reform directly connected with this ecclesiology.

With regard to the interpretation of the Council Pope Benedict XVI offered hermeneutic instructions to dispel confusion and difficulties in its application (Discourse to Roman Curia at Christmas, 22 December 2005). The Pope distinguished between mistaken hermeneutics "of discontinuity and interruption", and authentic hermeneutics, "of the reform". While the former in fact affirms that the true spirit of the Council should go further than the texts produced - said to be fruit of a compromise- and should be concretely opening to what is new, the latter rightly reads in the Council commitment to "express a particular truth in a new way", presenting elements of continuity and discontinuity.

Just as with the truths of faith, susceptible not to variation but to better understanding in view of "development" of the truth in question, so also with the reform. This is why the Liturgical reform of Vatican II introduced some changes not for the sake of novelty in itself, but in view of greater fidelity to the mystery of God ever better understood and to meet the demands of pastoral charity.

3. Therefore in the light of the teaching of Vatican II, with regard to the liturgical space and especially that of the altar, it is necessary to keep in mind the importance of "full active participation of all God's holy people... devout and active participation by the faithful" (Sacrosanctum Concilium nn. 48 e 51).

This is not simply a pastoral encouragement, it is a statement rooted in a precise ecclesiology according to which "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" (ivi n. 7). Therefore the faithful and the ordained ministers, invested respectively with the common priesthood and ministerial or hierarchical priesthood, while being distinct in essence "share in the same priesthood of Christ" (Lumen gentium n. 10) and while the sacred minister "makes present in the person of Christ the Eucharist sacrifice, offering it to God on behalf of the whole people", the faithful "join in the offering of the Eucharist" (ivi).

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