



VATICAN - WORDS OF DOCTRINE Participation (1) Basic Elements of the Roman Liturgy **Rev. Nicola Bux and Rev. Salvatore Vitiello**

Vatican City (Fides Service) -Widespread among the clergy and certain “committed laity” the idea that active participation in the liturgy consists in involving as many people as possible, as often as possible, to sing everything, respond loudly, move several times from their place, all to receive communion, otherwise the Mass is not valid. It is wrongly presumed that all those present are «perfect» faithful and not a mixture of catechumens, penitents and people in search of God or the truth, as it has always been in the history and the Church and her rites.

Instead the term “action”, from which comes “particip-ation”, refers, according to liturgical sources, to the great prayer, the ‘oratio’, the Eucharistic canon: in synthesis, to participate means praying. This would seem obvious: if liturgy were not prayer, what else would it be? A play, a film with actors and spectators? One often sees priest and faithful looking around when they pray or move, they are therefore distracted not turned to the Lord.

The words of the prophet resound: « Because this people draw near to me, and with their mouth and with their lips to honor me, but have removed their heart far from me » (Is 29,13). But we will deal with the attitude of prayer later. Here we note “The definition of the Eucharist as oratio was a fundamental answer for both pagans and searching intellectuals. This expression said to those who were seeking: sacrifices of animal, and all that existed and exists among you and can never satisfy, are no longer. They are replaced by the sacrifice-word. We are the spiritual religion, we worship in word; we do not sacrifice lambs or calves, we address God as the One who sustains our existence and our word is united with the Word par excellence, with God’s own Logos who uplifts us to true adoration” (J. Ratzinger, Introduzione allo spirito della liturgia, San Paolo 2001, p. 168).

Therefore the form of the liturgy, the Mass and the sacraments, is prayer: this form must be restored also in relation to the present day context of confrontation with non believers or members of other religions. The liturgy is the work of prayer, opus Dei, in a word: public integral worship born of the certainty of the presence of God whom we wish to know, to understand and strive to encounter.

The liturgy is the most manifest act of the sense of religion: cult, to «cultivate» (from the Latin colere) what is important, analogous to all that leads to make culture, word with the same root. We see God who is invisible in the visible signs He works; He speaks, we come to know Him. Liturgy is coming to know God: we discover Him, we love Him even though we do not see Him, we contemplate his works, “in Him all things were made”, He is in us and we are in Him. He is strong and we are weak. He is powerful and we are powerless. He is spirit and we are body. The liturgy leads us back to God after sin, to convert our hearts to Him and feel the need to pray, to enter into contact with His holiness, with Him thrice Holy, we speak as children to our Father.

But these words are those which He himself addressed to us before in the “liturgy of the Word”, filled with loving mercy and peace. We reply offering the sacrifice of our word, our mind. A sacrifice which is one with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ “the Eucharistic Liturgy”. A dialogue of faith and love which demands contemplation and silence, so that we may hear God speaking quietly to our heart.

This is prayer and without it there would be no liturgy: indeed it is to this prayer that the liturgy leads. To this pleasing sacrifice, seeking always that which pleases Him and nothing pleases Him more than the prayer of His Son, the offering of His Son. Prayer uses words, but is not made of words. Prayer is made of true religion, devotion, faith which senses Presence. So prayer becomes a relationship of love with God from the depth of heart and mind.

For two persons in love many words and gestures are not necessary. One look suffices: to know that He stands at the door of the heart and knocks and waits for our freedom to open that He may enter and dine with us: He gave Himself to us, to each of us. To grasp all this the Liturgy must be interwoven with silence; to hear God knocking

the noise of passions must cease. In this way Liturgy expresses true religion (from Latin religere, to link) because it “links” us to God, it “binds” us with God, hides us in God, as St Paul says, my life is in Him: “It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2,20). Therefore we can say that participation in the liturgy comes from knowing that His grace is enough for us (2 Cor 12,9). (Agenzia Fides 11/1/2007; righe 56, parole 861)