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VATICAN - WORDS OF DOCTRINE
The Fundamental Elements of the Roman Liturgy (2) Christian Worship
Rev. Nicola Bux and Rev. Salvatore Vitiello -

Vatican City (Fides Service) - The Constitution on the Liturgy issued by the Second Vatican Council after describing the presence of Jesus Christ in the Church and in various ways in the Liturgy, above all the Eucharist, explains that precisely this presence makes possible «this great work wherein God is perfectly glorified and mankind is sanctified.» (SC n.7). The Liturgy is the work of Christ since He always associates Himself with the Church «His beloved Bride who calls to her Lord, and through Him offers worship to the Eternal Father». The liturgy is an "exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ" and the sanctification of the man is signified by signs perceptible to the senses, thus the Church, mystical Body of Christ, Head and members, exercises the «whole public worship».

This in essence is participation, truly effective for the glory of God and the salvation of mankind. What is more «in the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims» (n.8), with all the saints we sing a hymn to the Lord's glory. Thus we enter the heavenly liturgy because heaven comes down to earth as Dionigi said and according to emissaries of Vladimir in Constantinople in Nestor's chronicle. The Book of Revelation in fact is typical for the Church's Liturgy which rather than 'creative' is imitative (mimesis) of that of heaven.

If the Lord's Presence is a condition without which the Liturgy cannot exist, it follows that the first 'act' of participation is conversion to Him, lift up your hearts: "We lift them up to the Lord" is the response in the dialogue which opens the Eucharistic Prayer. The second is offering of self: "Offer your bodies in spiritual sacrifice" (Rom 12,1). This passage is decisive for understanding Christian worship; to offer (Greek parastêsai, Latin exhibeatis) indicates the act of placing before God the sacrifice of our very self (in Latin devovere).

Devotion is offering, the culminating act of Christian worship and accomplished expression of the spirit of the Liturgy; whereas devotionism instead indicates a reduction of that act to the merely formal and exterior aspect. However this is not the most widespread sickness among Christians today; which instead is doubt, lack or scarcity of faith, scepticism, unawareness of the Presence of Christ and His work in the Church and the world by virtue of His Paschal Mystery: all things which can be traced to man's searching for meaning.

The third 'act' or, if you will, the consequence of the first two is piety and devotion. Leiturghia means action by God's holy people, pietas, therefore popular. Pietas towards God, acknowledgment and adoration, is the spirit of the Liturgy. Then there is the culminating act: communion with the mystical Body which precedes Eucharistic communion, whether one is or is not in the necessary conditions to receive the latter. Communion with the mystical body in the Liturgy "makes us philosophers", making faith and reason merge in visible worship, because Roman Liturgy, indeed Christian Liturgy tout-court, unlike the other world religions, is worship conformed to reason. All this renders participation fruitful.

We have in a sense identified the "criteria" to understand to what extent the Roman Liturgy is respected or misrepresented in the different churches and communities. For example, if the priest strives to follow the ars celebrandi, according to the genius proper to the Roman Liturgy, he should take as its reference Benedictine monastic liturgy where it has retained certain norms: firstly reciting or singing softly without raising the tone or worse, shouting; then being brief and simple in homilies and exhortations, avoiding - as Jesus says - pagan verbosity, the more the words, the better they are heard. Rightly Medieval Liturgy taught us to use the bell because of its discretion when calling attention to the most important moments. Lastly, performing the Rites with simple solemnity, free of any ostentation, so they may express the truth of the heart; in Greek we would say with eusebeia, in Latin pietas, in other words the Fathers' devotio or pieta.

This is the worship of the true religion, because not we, but the Lord works in the Liturgy: "it is He who baptises"

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and we are small before Him, He must grow while we must diminish. Gustave Bardy made a comparison between the humble worship of Christians and the proud cult of pagans; in its respect and love for Divinity Christian worship must not be spectacular. The difference is that we glorify not men and their actions but God. (Agenzia Fides 8/2/2007; righe 51, parole 766)

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