



NewsLetter

C O M M I T T E E O N D I V I N E W O R S H I P

Members

Most Rev. Leonard P. Blair, *Chairman*
Archbishop of Hartford
Most Rev. Steven J. Lopes, *Chair-Elect*
Bishop of the Chair of Saint Peter
Most Rev. Paul S. Coakley
Archbishop of Oklahoma City
Most Rev. Samuel J. Aquila
Archbishop of Denver
Most Rev. Joseph M. Siegel
Bishop of Evansville
Most Rev. Christopher J. Coyne
Bishop of Burlington
Most Rev. John T. Folda
Bishop of Fargo
Most Rev. Daniel E. Garcia
Bishop of Monterey
Most Rev. Daniel H. Mueggenborg
Bishop of Reno
Most Rev. Timothy C. Senior
Auxiliary Bishop of Philadelphia

Consultants

Right Rev. Gregory J. Polan, OSB
Abbot Primate of the
Benedictine Confederation
Right Rev. Jeremy Driscoll, OSB
Abbot of Mount Angel Abbey
Rev. James W. Bessert
Rev. Ryan T. Ruiz
Sr. Marilú Covani, SP
Mr. Christopher J. Carstens
Dr. Jennifer Donelson-Nowicka
Mrs. Rita A. Thiron

Secretariat

Rev. Andrew Menke
Executive Director
Rev. Dustin P. Dought
Associate Director
Mrs. Silvina Cerezo
Multicultural Specialist
Mr. Matthew M. Godbey
Administrative Assistant
Mr. David K. Ringwald
Staff Assistant

**USCCB Secretariat of
Divine Worship**
3211 Fourth Street, NE
Washington, DC 20017
Tel: (202) 541-3060
Fax: (202) 541-3088
www.USCCB.org

© 2022 USCCB

Volume LVIII

September 2022

Reflections on Part Two of *Desiderio desideravi*

In the second part of his Apostolic Letter *Desiderio desideravi*, Pope Francis treats the topic of liturgical formation. At the heart of his analysis is the question, “How do we recover the capacity to live completely the liturgical action?” (no. 27). The Holy Father first examines our contemporary context and then proceeds to discuss two aspects of liturgical formation: formation for the liturgy and formation by the liturgy.

Contemporary Context (nos. 27-34)

According to Pope Francis, our postmodern context lacks a horizon or frame which gives people direction, value, and meaning. Consequently, the worldviews of individualism, subjectivism, and abstract spiritualism have become more influential (cf. spiritual worldliness, nos. 18-20). In the liturgical sphere, these circumstances render us less capable of symbolic action and understanding, fundamental characteristics of the liturgical act. At the Second Vatican Council, the Church encountered and spoke to this modern world, and its response intentionally began with the liturgy, highlighting its importance and unique place in the life of the Church. Contemporary tensions around the liturgy, which frequently consist in not accepting or superficially understanding the liturgical reforms which followed the Council, distract us from the necessary question: “How can we grow in our capacity to live in full the liturgical action? How do we continue to let ourselves be amazed at what happens in the celebration under our very eyes?” (no. 31). For the Holy Father, the answer to this question is a serious and vital liturgical formation.

Paradoxically, the postmodern context which renders liturgy difficult may only be healed by the liturgy itself. Only the community of Pentecost and its celebration “can open the cramped space of spiritual individualism” (no. 32). This celebration is the privileged place of encounter with Christ in which we become persons who are fully human and open to full relationships with God, creation, and others. To become fully human and to be open to full relationship, this is the critical matter for Pope Francis concerning liturgical formation. The Holy Father cites the German liturgical theologian, Romano Guardini (1885–1968), who writes, “[C]arried along by this inner transformation of our time, we must learn anew how to relate religiously as fully human beings.” Only liturgical formation accomplishes this goal, without which the reforms of texts and rites are not very helpful.

Formation for the Liturgy (nos. 35-39)

The first aspect of liturgical formation that the Pope treats is formation *for* the liturgy. Here, it is necessary to spread the knowledge of the liturgy’s theological sense – beyond academic environments, in accessible ways, to all the faithful. This theological

sense is fundamental for the understanding, practice, and celebration of the liturgy. Pope Francis recalls the assembly of the Church on the Lord's Day and other occasions. In these celebrations, ordained ministers accomplish a task of "the first importance," leading the Church, the "celebrating subject," into an experience of the Paschal Mystery. Study and frequent participation in the liturgy help the ordained minister to accomplish this task.

In seminaries, the liturgy must occupy a central place in both study and practice. In study, the liturgical celebration has the power "to offer an organic and unified vision of all theological knowledge" (no. 37), for all theological disciplines are connected to the liturgy. In practice, placing the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist at the center of the community's life creates "a comprehensive, organic, and integrated pastoral practice" (no. 37), for every aspect of the Church's life finds its source and summit in the liturgy. It is necessary that this celebration of the liturgy be not only excellent according to the rubrics but also authentic and alive. Through this kind of celebration, theological knowledge comes to fulfillment in communion with God, and the ordained minister becomes capable of accompanying others along the same path. For all members of the Church, liturgical formation is ongoing.

Formation by the Liturgy (nos. 40-47)

The second aspect of liturgical formation is the formation received by participation in the liturgy. Formation *for* the liturgy is ordered toward formation *by* the liturgy. Again, Pope Francis reiterates that knowledge of the mystery of Christ is not about the mental assimilation of concepts but rather existential engagement with his person. Therefore, the liturgy does not consist in knowing, and its purpose is not primarily pedagogical, even though it has great pedagogical value. Its primary purpose is praise and thanksgiving for the Pasch of Christ, and its goal is to conform us to him. In addition to not being about knowledge, the liturgy takes place sacramentally, according to the method of Incarnation. It is carried out not with abstractions but with creation. Christ assumes all of creation, and all that he has assumed is placed at the service of an encounter with him, a truth which the Holy Father notes is beautifully expressed in the prayers of blessing baptismal water, consecrating chrism, and presenting gifts of bread and wine at the Eucharist. A liturgy that glorifies God is one that reveals God and allows the faithful to partake of the Paschal Mystery.

Authentic participation in the liturgy requires a capacity for symbolic action and symbolic understanding. Making and reading symbols is the task of the entire Church, a task which is complicated by the postmodern context. This difficulty is also experienced with the symbol of the body, an intimate union of interior and exterior, i.e., soul and body. The interior soul is expressed exteriorly, and in this exterior expression the soul is seen. This fact of the intimate union of soul and body makes the human creature unique. To ignore the soul is to ignore this uniqueness as well as the transcendent dimension of life in which both God and ourselves are known. The symbolic power of created things is also experienced with great difficulty. Consequently, the Pope notes, "To have lost the capacity to grasp the symbolic value of the body and of every creature renders the symbolic language of the Liturgy almost inaccessible to the modern mentality" (no. 44). Nevertheless, we cannot dispense with symbols – the way in which God has chosen to encounter us – and must recover our capacity to understand and enact symbols.

This recovery may take place in three ways. First, one must reject the temptation to reduce symbols to abstractions and the act of reading symbols to a mental process. Symbols are incarnate and reading them occurs in a living experience. Second, one must have confidence in creation, its divine origin, its assumption in the Incarnation of the Word, and its purpose – from the very beginning – as an instrument of salvation. Third, this recovery occurs through a particular kind of formation. Here, the Holy Father uses the example of a child learning the sign of the cross from a relative, teacher, or pastor. This symbol is taught by one who takes the child's hand, makes the gesture, and slowly articulates the words which accompany it. In this way, the child assimilates the symbol. It becomes a habit and grows in meaning. The symbol belongs to the one making it, and the one making it belongs to the symbol. The symbol forms the one making it, and by the symbol the one making it is formed. This formation does not require much speech or total understanding, but only that the person making it has the humility of a little one, "the attitude that opens up into wonder" (no. 38).

Understanding the *Order of Penance*: Reconciling Individual Penitents

Chapter three of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, “The Other Sacraments and the Sacramentals,” opens in no. 59 with a theological definition of the Sacraments:

The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God; because they are signs they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it; that is why they are called “sacraments of faith.” They do indeed impart grace, but, in addition, the very act of celebrating them most effectively disposes the faithful to receive this grace in a fruitful manner, to worship God duly, and to practice charity.

As the Church in the United States prepares to welcome the new translation of the *Order of Penance*, it may be helpful to examine this definition more closely and – in its light – the celebration of the sacrament, especially its most common form of celebration, the Order for Reconciling Individual Penitents.

The Purpose of the Sacraments

The definition begins by articulating the goal of the sacraments: “The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God” (no. 59). The purpose of the sacraments is sanctification, and this sanctifying purpose has three aspects: individual, communal, and doxological.¹ First, sacraments *make individuals holy*. This holiness, which is imparted to individual persons, is not, however, merely individual. Thus, the second aspect of the sanctifying purpose is to *build up the body of Christ*, a phrase added to the text of no. 59 during the Council’s second session. The Fathers at the Second Vatican Council sought to emphasize this aspect of the liturgy in particular, and their desire finds especially eloquent articulation in no. 26 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: “Liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations of the Church, which is the ‘sacrament of unity,’ namely, the holy people united and ordered under their bishops. Therefore liturgical services pertain to the whole body of the Church; they manifest it and have effects upon it.” With those sacraments that do not appear as communal because of their nature and circumstance, for example, Penance and the Anointing of the Sick, it is particularly important to stress this communal aspect of sanctification.

Finally, the sanctifying purpose concerns not only people but also God: sacraments are ordered toward the *worship which is to be given to God*. In particular, the Sacrament of Penance restores men and women to God’s worship, whose perfect expression is the Eucharist. More broadly, the members of the Church worship God in sacramental liturgy: they not only receive sacraments but also celebrate them. According to Josef Jungmann in his commentary on the Constitution, “The cultic character of the sacraments (and sacramentals) is made evident by the fact that their accomplishment, in which the grace of God descends to man, is comprised within a framework of prayer, with which they return to God in supplication and thankfulness.”² Sacraments sanctify individuals, this sanctification has communal effects, and it is inextricably bound up with the glorification of God.

Sacramental Purpose in the Order for Reconciling Individual Penitents

This threefold purpose, which sacramental grace brings about, is also expressed by sacramental signs. In the Order for Reconciling Individual Penitents, the purpose of individual sanctification is perhaps the most obvious, expressed throughout the entire rite: “May God grant that you may truly know your sins and his mercy” (*Order of Penance*, no. 42, Reception of the Penitent); “I absolve you from your sins” (no. 46, Formula of Absolution); and “The Lord has forgiven your sins” (no. 47, Dismissal of the Penitent). Nevertheless, this Order for individuals also expresses the ecclesial purpose of the sacraments, the fact that this liturgy is performed by the Church, manifests it, and has effects upon it. The sacrament is usually celebrated in a confessional in a church or oratory, that place where the Christian faithful gather (no. 12). Some elements of the rite, especially the short readings

¹ This analysis and what follows depends in part upon Pierre-Marie Gy, “Chapitre III: Les autres sacrements et les sacramentaux,” *La Maison Dieu* 77 (1964): 133-136; Frederick McManus, “The Constitution on Liturgy Commentary, Part Three,” *Worship* 38 (1964): 515-518; and Josef Jungmann, “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” trans. Lalit Adolphus, in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, 5 vols. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 1:46-47.

² Jungmann, 47.

from Sacred Scripture, use first person plural pronouns to describe the mighty works of God: “It was *our* infirmities that he bore, *our* sufferings that he endured” (no. 72, Is 53:4a, emphasis added). The Prayer of Absolution, in particular, expresses the sacrament as an act of the Church: “through the ministry of the Church may God grant you pardon and peace” (no. 46).

Finally, the sacrament’s doxological purpose is also articulated. As previously noted, the mere fact that sacramental grace is given within the context of liturgical prayer expresses its doxological character as well as its relationship to the most perfect praise offered in the Eucharist. This character is further highlighted by the place of celebration, a confessional within a church or oratory, and, when prescribed by the local Ordinary, liturgical vestments (no. 14). The Proclamation of Praise of God especially highlights this aspect of the sacrament: “Give thanks to the Lord for he is good. / For his mercy endures for ever” (no. 47). The penitent’s first act after receiving sacramental absolution is to respond “Amen” and then to give praise, already carrying out that restoration to worship which the sacrament has brought about.

The Importance of Sacramental Signs

What sacramental grace brings about in reality is expressed in sacramental signs. This meaning is expressed not only through the signs of matter and form but also through all the signs of the liturgical celebration of a sacrament. It is this rich complex of sacramental signs that disposes the faithful to receive the grace of God more fruitfully. Indeed, the fruitful reception of grace is one of the chief concerns of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, expressed at the conclusion of the paragraph being considered: “They do indeed impart grace, but, in addition, the very act of celebrating them most effectively disposes the faithful to receive this grace in a fruitful manner, to worship God duly, and to practice charity” (no. 59). In the Order for Reconciling Individual Penitents, all of the signs that express the individual, communal, and doxological purpose of the sacrament, these very signs dispose the faithful to receive the grace which the signs of matter and form bring about; they also express it.

Understanding the Order for Reconciling Individual Penitents in light of the threefold purpose articulated by the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy shows what is at stake in the liturgical celebration of Penance. To neglect the fullness of the liturgy of penance, even while observing the laws for valid celebration, still communicates grace, but it does not “most effectively dispose the faithful to receive this grace in a fruitful manner” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 59). The sacrament validly carried out is not fully expressed in sacramental signs. While the priest may omit or shorten some parts of the rite in imminent danger of death or when pastoral need dictates (*Order of Penance*, no. 21), to do so outside of these circumstances in ways not foreseen by the rite impacts sacramental fruitfulness. The concern of the minister should always be not only that grace be given, but also that the recipient is disposed to the grace given, and that this grace is fully expressed and most fruitfully received.



Archbishop Rembert Weakland, Former Committee Chairman, Passes Away

Milwaukee Archbishop Emeritus Rembert G. Weakland, O.S.B. passed away on August 22, 2022 at the age of 95. He served as Chairman of the Committee on the Liturgy from 1978 to 1981, and returned as a member from 1996 to 1999. Just after the Second Vatican Council, Weakland was the founding Chairman of the Committee’s Music Advisory Board, established to consult on liturgical music. For the repose of his soul, we pray:

Almighty ever-living God,
to whom we never pray without hope of your mercy,
be gracious to your servant Archbishop Rembert,
who departed this life confessing your name,
and admit him to the company of your Saints.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.