



Newsletter

Committee on Divine Worship

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Cardinal Pierre's Homily at the 2025 National Meeting of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions

The 2025 National Meeting of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions took place in Baltimore from September 30-October 2, under the theme "The Church at Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours." Major presentations were given by Arthur Cardinal Roche, Prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, and Abbot Primate Emeritus Gregory J. Polan, OSB. The participants were also addressed during the meeting by Bishop Michael G. Woost, Auxiliary Bishop of Cleveland and Committee Chairman-Elect. The homily given at the opening Mass by Christophe Cardinal Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, is reprinted for the benefit of our readers:

It is good to be with you this evening as you begin your annual meeting; and, together with Cardinal Roche, to convey to all of you the spiritual closeness of Pope Leo. Warm greetings to the other bishops, and to all the priests, deacons, religious, and lay faithful who are here, who serve the Church's worship so generously. On the Memorial of St. Jerome, we honor a priest and Doctor of the Church whose burning love for Sacred Scripture and tireless labor in making the Word of God accessible still inspire us.

Zechariah's Prophecy and the Church as the New Jerusalem

Our first reading from Zechariah lifts our eyes to universality: peoples of every nation saying, "Come, let us go to implore the favor of the Lord" (Zec 8:21). The prophet sees a day when people of every nationality shall say to the people of God: "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you" (Zec 8:23).

This vision foreshadows the mystery of the Church, where all nations gather through Baptism, are nourished at the table of the Eucharist, and are sent forth to witness that God is with us. The Responsorial Psalm echoes the same truth: even those once estranged from Israel will be able to say of Zion, "My home is within you" (Ps 87:7).

For us who labor in liturgical life, this is not abstract. The liturgy is where Zechariah's prophecy is fulfilled, where men and women of every tongue and people gather to implore the Lord's favor.

Pope Francis, in *Desiderio desideravi*, describes this banquet when he says:

To be admitted to the feast all that is required is the wedding garment of faith which comes from the hearing of his Word. The Church tailors such a garment to fit each one with the whiteness of a garment bathed in the blood of the Lamb. We must not allow ourselves even a moment of rest, knowing that still not everyone has received an invitation to this Supper or knowing that others have forgotten it or have got lost along the way in the twists and turns of human living. (no. 5)

Here the Holy Father names what Zechariah saw: all peoples summoned to God's dwelling, clothed in Christ, seated at his banquet. This is why the Church must live with a missionary spirit, so that every person may find a place at the Supper of the Lamb.

The Rebuke of Christ and the Spirit of the Liturgy

In today's Gospel, Jesus journeys toward Jerusalem and is rejected by Samaritans. James and John, eager for vengeance, ask if they should call down fire. Jesus rebukes them. His mission is not to consume but to reconcile, not to destroy but to give his life as a ransom for many.

So too in the liturgy. Worship is never a weapon or a possession. It reveals Christ's humility, his service, his self-offering love.

Again, Pope Francis warns us:

I want the beauty of the Christian celebration and its necessary consequences for the life of the Church not to be spoiled by a superficial and foreshortened understanding of its value or, worse yet, by its being exploited in service of some ideological vision, no matter what the hue. The priestly prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper that all may be one judges every one of our divisions around the Bread broken, around the sacrament of mercy, the sign of unity, the bond of charity. (no. 16)

The rebuke of Jesus in the Gospel is echoed here: we must not divide the Church around the very table meant to unite her. True liturgical zeal is the zeal of Christ's cross—merciful and open to all.

St. Jerome: Love for Scripture, Love for the Liturgy

Saint Jerome, whose memorial we celebrate, gave the Church the Vulgate, the translation of Scripture that nourished Christian life for centuries. He is remembered for his saying: "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ."

This has everything to do with the liturgy. The liturgy is, above all, the living Word of God proclaimed and enacted. In every Mass and throughout the Liturgy of the Hours, the Church takes the Word of God on her lips and allows it to shape her prayer. Without Scripture, the liturgy withers into mere ceremony; with it, the liturgy becomes the place where Christ himself speaks.

Jerome's devotion to the Bible is a call for us: to prepare the readings with care, sing the psalms with reverence, and break open the Word as bread for the faithful. In a world saturated with words yet starving for meaning, the liturgy must resound with the living Word.

Liturgical Formation for the People of God

Pope Francis, in *Desiderio desideravi*, insists that the liturgy is not about an "idea" but about "an encounter with the

risen Lord" who still desires to share the Last Supper with us (nos. 41, 37; cf. Lk 22:15). Liturgical formation, then, is not simply about rubrics or gestures, but about being drawn into the mystery we celebrate.

This is crucial for the work of diocesan liturgical commissions. We are not managers of ritual. We are servants of encounter. Our mission is to help God's people enter the liturgy as the privileged place of meeting Christ, who speaks his Word and gives his Body and Blood.

Francis also warns against "spiritual worldliness," where liturgy becomes subject to personal tastes or disputes (no. 17). The antidote is amazement before the Eucharist: awe at a mystery we cannot control but only receive.

The Call for Today

The readings, the witness of St. Jerome, and the teaching of Pope Francis converge in a clear call. We are to keep Zechariah's vision alive: the Church as the place where all nations gather. We are to heed Christ's rebuke: renouncing destructive zeal for the humble zeal of his cross. We are to imitate Jerome's passion for Scripture, ensuring that the Word of God is the heartbeat of our celebrations. And we are to embrace the Pope's summons to liturgical formation, so that all God's people may encounter Christ in the liturgy.

This mission is important. In a world of division and indifference, many abandon worship altogether. Yet the liturgy provides an answer: the gathering of nations into communion, the proclamation of the living Word, the presence of God with us.

May this Eucharist renew in us the wonder of worship. May it strengthen us to serve with humility, charity, and zeal. And may St. Jerome intercede for us, that we may always recognize and adore Christ, the Word made flesh. Amen.

Bishop Seitz Accepts the McManus Award at the 2025 National Meeting of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions

During the 2025 National Meeting of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions in Baltimore, El Paso Bishop Mark J. Seitz, a member of the Committee on Divine Worship, accepted the 2025 Frederick R. McManus Award for his advocacy for immigrants and the relationship between the liturgy and social justice. His remarks are excerpted for the benefit of our readers:

The reception of this honor has led me to think about what the Liturgy has meant to me in my life. The simple answer is *everything*. The Liturgy means everything to me and I believe it means everything to the world. In the Liturgy I believe I have stumbled upon a great discovery. I have discovered the Theory of Everything!

What is the Theory of Everything? Well, it is more than the title of a movie about the life of that brilliant astrophysicist and sufferer of ALS, Stephen Hawking. The Theory of Everything is a quest that Hawking undertook which became his life work.

I had an idea what the theory was seeking to explain, but I needed a little help, so here is how AI summed it up for me:

In simple terms, a “Theory of Everything” is a hypothetical framework that would unify all the fundamental forces of nature and all the different types of matter in the universe into one single, coherent theory. It aims to explain everything from the smallest subatomic particles to the largest structures like galaxies and the entire universe, using a single set of equations.

I raise this because what became the life work of Hawking in the field of science has really been my passion from the earliest recollections of my life. Don’t get me wrong, I am no Stephen Hawking! But from my earliest memories I have been a questioner and my questions always grew out of a search for meaning and an intuition that meaning is indeed able to be discovered. There is a logic, an order, a beauty to life that begins with, but also transcends, anything science could investigate.

There has always been within me a conflict between head and heart, a struggle between an intellectual quest to know the answers to the wondrous mysteries of the world around me and a desire to have a relationship with the One who is the source of it all. I have wanted to know him and all he has revealed. “When I behold your heavens, the work of your hands... Who are we that you should be mindful of us or your children that you should care for us?” (Ps 8:4-5). [...]

That quest led me back to the Church with her 2000-year-old claim to be Christ’s living Body in the world. I wanted to learn all she had to teach, but even that was not all I longed for. It’s one thing to know about someone, another thing to know the person, to have a relationship based upon a mutual friendship, a mutual love.

I am no mystic – I wish I were! – but in both intimate private moments and particularly in very public ones, in acts of worship, I have sensed God’s mysterious presence. As we sing in Spanish, “Dios está aquí, tan cierto como el aire que respiro.” I have sensed God present with his mercy in moments when I felt lost in sin and in moments of jubilation when he chose me by the laying on of hands. I encounter him in his Sacrifice, which we renew in Eucharist and in the Communion of his Body and Blood. [...]

I have seen in *every human person* a universe to be discovered. But all these wonders lead me back to the ultimate Mysteries. Those bring me back to the Church and the Church leads me to the Lord whom I encounter in his many disguises, as Mother Teresa used to say, such as in the poor and the sick, the immigrant and the unborn child.

All of these encounters lead me to the worship of the Church, the Liturgy. The saving encounter there sustains and strengthens me and makes it possible for me to go forth recognizing his hand in the midst of this broken world and pointing him out to others.

I guess what I am saying is that I have discovered in the Liturgy, my “Theory of Everything.” It is in the act of worship that all human experience and all the “forces of nature” down to the smallest subatomic particles and to the largest structures in the universe come together in a single set of equations, all of it converges in the mysterious wisdom and workings of the Creator.

How I wish that the world, how I wish that everyone within the Church, how I wish that I would grasp that gift of God present to us in worship and in Sacrament! How I wish that our worship would become a fitting expression of all that it signifies by its full, conscious, and active expression on the part of bishops and priests, and all the faithful! It is in pursuit of these riches that I have sought to encourage a renewed focus on the *ars celebrandi*, rendering more transparent and fruitful our entrance into the Sacred Mysteries. [...]

Time and the cosmos, nature and symbol, language and gesture; all of creation becomes but a tool in the hand of God offering us an entry into the Mystery we celebrate. Even scientific knowledge and theory should both humble us and offer us conceptual pathways open to the realm of the Spirit. [...]

We all are rightly impressed with the amazing power of the Hubble and now the Webb Space Telescopes. They have peered literally back billions of years in time, detecting light that has reached us from stars that formed in the relatively early eons of the existence of the universe.

But for all those accomplishments, all those amazing discoveries, do you know how much of the universe we are capable of probing and detecting with all of our highly advanced instruments? Scientists estimate that we can see or in some way directly detect only about 5% of that which makes up our universe! [...]

My point in all this, in my “Theory of Everything” is that, if we have come to believe through science that 95% of the universe is unseen and unknown, what makes it so unreasonable to believe in a spiritual universe whose existence is revealed in history and which can be experienced by faith? [...]

This brings me back to the Liturgy and to my “Theory of Everything.” As Pope Francis so perceptively pointed out in his wonderful Apostolic Letter *Desiderio desideravi*, we people of faith have come to see that everything in existence was created for a primary, a primordial purpose, to reveal the presence and work of the Divine, through symbol.

In our Sacramental system material realities speak to us as no mere words can, of the presence and action of spiritual realities upon our lives. In this vein, Francis makes this bold assertion, first using water as an example:

The prayer for the blessing of baptismal water reveals to us that God created water precisely with Baptism in mind. This means that when God created water, he was thinking of the Baptism of each one of us, and this same thought accompanied him all throughout his acting in the history of salvation every time that, with precise intention, he used water for his saving work. (*Desiderio desideravi*, no. 13)

Water in the hands of God gives spiritual healing and life; bread, transformed by God in an act that transcends time, nourishes us with his very self; blest oil brings spiritual healing and, according to God’s will, can also bring about bodily healing completely unexplained by medical science.

And so, take great pride in your work, liturgists and practitioners of Liturgy, People of God. You, like me, have stumbled upon the “Theory of Everything!” Your Creator has called you to enter into and to reveal the mysteries of life and of reality itself. Love and cherish this awesome universe so capable of opening the door, not only to supernovas, but to the supernatural, to an encounter with God and to become his holy instruments, not only to know the created universe, but, in union with Christ, to save it!

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