

Tridentine Community News

March 18, 2007

Sacramentum Caritatis

By the time you read this, surely the Catholic world will be eagerly discussing Pope Benedict XVI's just-released Apostolic Exhortation following last year's Synod of Bishops. It would do well for all Catholics to read this document, available at www.vatican.va. Even the footnotes are an interesting read.

Some of the early reactions from Traditional Catholic corners were expressions of disappointment. For example, some felt that the Holy Father could have used this document as a platform to advocate *ad orientem* celebration of the Mass.

The philosophy of this column has always been to focus on what's good in the Church, both locally and globally. One can always find something to complain about, but realistically, how is authentic change going to come about? Not by autocratic edict from above – that could be counteracted by a future Pope's ruling. Long-term and effective liturgical reform must come in baby steps from reasoned documents and good example. Echoing topics this column has discussed, our Holy Father makes several points of interest to those who love the Traditional Mass:

“The Synod recalled that Bishops have the pastoral duty of...encouraging frequent confession among the faithful. All priests should dedicate themselves with generosity, commitment and competency to administering the sacrament of Reconciliation. In this regard, it is important that the confessionals in our churches should be clearly visible expressions of the importance of this sacrament. I ask pastors to be vigilant with regard to the celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation, and to limit the practice of general absolution exclusively to the cases permitted, since individual absolution is the only form intended for ordinary use...Finally, a balanced and sound practice of gaining indulgences, whether for oneself or for the dead, can be helpful for a renewed appreciation of the relationship between the Eucharist and Reconciliation.” (Paragraph 21)

“A solid knowledge of the history of sacred art can be advantageous for those responsible for commissioning artists and architects to create works of art for the liturgy. Consequently it is essential that the education of seminarians and priests include the study of art history, with special reference to sacred buildings and the corresponding liturgical norms.” (Paragraph 41)

“...I desire, in accordance with the request advanced by the Synod Fathers, that Gregorian chant be suitably esteemed and employed as the chant proper to the Roman liturgy.” (Paragraph 42)

“It should be kept in mind that nothing is lost when the sign of peace is marked by a sobriety which preserves the proper spirit of the celebration, as, for example, when it is restricted to one's immediate neighbours.” (Paragraph 49)

“Taking into account ancient and venerable customs and the wishes expressed by the Synod Fathers, I have asked the competent curial offices to study the possibility of moving the sign of peace to another place, such as before the presentation of

the gifts at the altar. To do so would also serve as a significant reminder of the Lord's insistence that we be reconciled with others before offering our gifts to God.” (Footnote 150)

“It should be made clear that the word ‘participation’ does not refer to mere external activity during the celebration. In fact, the active participation called for by the Council must be understood in more substantial terms, on the basis of a greater awareness of the mystery being celebrated and its relationship to daily life. The conciliar Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* encouraged the faithful to take part in the eucharistic liturgy not ‘as strangers or silent spectators,’ but as participants ‘in the sacred action, conscious of what they are doing, actively and devoutly.’” (Paragraph 52)

“Clearly, full participation in the Eucharist takes place when the faithful approach the altar in person to receive communion. Yet true as this is, care must be taken lest they conclude that the mere fact of their being present in church during the liturgy gives them a right or even an obligation to approach the table of the Eucharist. Even in cases where it is not possible to receive sacramental communion, participation at Mass remains necessary, important, meaningful and fruitful. In such circumstances it is beneficial to cultivate a desire for full union with Christ through the practice of spiritual communion, praised by Pope John Paul II and recommended by saints who were masters of the spiritual life.” (Paragraph 55)

“In order to express more clearly the unity and universality of the Church, I wish to endorse the proposal made by the Synod of Bishops, in harmony with the directives of the Second Vatican Council, that, with the exception of the readings, the homily and the prayer of the faithful, such [international, large-scale] liturgies could be celebrated in Latin. Similarly, the better-known prayers of the Church's tradition should be recited in Latin and, if possible, selections of Gregorian chant should be sung. Speaking more generally, I ask that future priests, from their time in the seminary, receive the preparation needed to understand and to celebrate Mass in Latin, and also to use Latin texts and execute Gregorian chant; nor should we forget that the faithful can be taught to recite the more common prayers in Latin, and also to sing parts of the liturgy to Gregorian chant.” (Paragraph 62)

“...where the high altar with its tabernacle is still in place, it is appropriate to continue to use this structure for the reservation and adoration of the Eucharist, taking care not to place the celebrant's chair in front of it.” (Paragraph 69)

As recently as September, 2003, if you wanted to attend a Tridentine Mass in the Detroit area, you had to go to a nursing home chapel in Windsor and be sprayed down with a disinfectant upon entry to the building to ensure that you were not carrying the SARS virus. In under four years, we now have two well attended Tridentine Masses on both sides of the river, in proper church facilities. Can we not similarly hope that over the next few years, Almighty God will move the highest authorities in the Church to restore liturgical decorum to the typical Catholic experience? *Sacramentum Caritatis* seems a significant step in that direction.