

Tridentine Community News

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Introduction to the Spirit of the Liturgy by Msgr. Guido Marini, Part 2 of 6

On January 6, 2010 a landmark speech was given by Msgr. Guido Marini, the Pontifical Master of Liturgical Ceremonies, at the Year For Priests Clergy Conference in Rome. There is no need to speculate on what Rome believes is suitable liturgy when clear direction such as this is given. Msgr. Marini was appointed by Pope Benedict XVI to reform papal liturgies according to our Holy Father's thinking. We believe Msgr. Marini's words speak for themselves, and so we are presenting his speech in its entirety.

What, then, do we mean by the sacred liturgy? The East would in this case speak of the divine dimension in the Liturgy, or, to be more precise, of that dimension which is not left to the arbitrary will of man, because it is a gift which comes from on high. It refers, in other words, to the mystery of salvation in Christ, entrusted to the Church in order to make it available in every moment and in every place by means of the objective nature of the liturgical and sacramental rites. This is a reality surpassing us, which is to be received as gift, and which must be allowed to transform us. Indeed, the Second Vatican Council affirms: "...every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the priest and of His Body which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others..." (Sacrosanctum Concilium, n.7)

From this perspective it is not difficult to realise how far distant some modes of conduct are from the authentic spirit of the liturgy. In fact, some individuals have managed to upset the liturgy of the Church in various ways under the pretext of a wrongly devised creativity. This was done on the grounds of adapting to the local situation and the needs of the community, thus appropriating the right to remove from, add to, or modify the liturgical rite in pursuit of subjective and emotional ends. For this, we priests are largely responsible.

For this reason, already back in 2001, the former Cardinal Ratzinger asserted: "There is need of, at the very least, of a new liturgical awareness that might put a stop to the tendency to treat the liturgy as if it were an object open to manipulation. We have reached the point where liturgical groups stitch together the Sunday liturgy on their own authority. The result is certainly the imaginative product of a group of able and skilled individuals. But in this way the space where one may encounter the "totally other" is reduced, in which the Holy offers Himself as gift; what I come upon is only the skill of a group of people. It is then that we realise that we are looking for something else. It is too little, and at the same time, something different. The most important thing today is to acquire anew a respect for the liturgy, and an awareness that it is not open to manipulation. To learn once again to recognise in its nature a living creation that grows and has been given as gift, through which we participate in the heavenly liturgy. To renounce seeking in it our own self-realisation in order to see a gift instead. This, I believe, is of primary importance: to overcome the temptation of a despotic behaviour, which conceives the liturgy as an object, the property of man, and to re-awaken the interior sense of the holy." (from 'God and the World'; translation from the Italian)

To affirm, therefore, that the liturgy is sacred presupposes the fact that the liturgy does not exist subject to the sporadic modifications and arbitrary inventions of one individual or group. The liturgy is not a closed circle in which we decide to meet, perhaps to encourage one another, to feel we are the protagonists of some feast. The liturgy is God's summons to His people to be in His presence; it is the advent of God among us; it is God encountering us in this world.

A certain adaptation to particular local situations is foreseen and rightly so. The Missal itself indicates where adaptations may be made in some of its sections, yet only in these and not arbitrarily in others. The reason for this is important and it is good to reassert it: the liturgy is a gift which precedes us, a precious treasure which has been delivered by the age-old prayer of the Church, the place in which the faith has found its form in time and its expression in prayer. It is not made available to us in order to be subjected to our personal interpretation; rather, the liturgy is made available so as to be fully at the disposal of all, yesterday just as today and also tomorrow. "Our time, too," wrote Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, "calls for a renewed awareness and appreciation of liturgical norms as a reflection of, and a witness to, the one universal Church made present in every celebration of the Eucharist." (n. 52)

In the brilliant Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, which is so often quoted in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Pope Pius XII defines the liturgy as "...the public worship... the worship rendered by the Mystical Body of Christ in the entirety of its Head and members." (n. 20) As if to say, among other things, that in the liturgy, the Church "officially" identifies herself in the mystery of her union with Christ as spouse, and where she "officially" reveals herself. What casual folly it is indeed, to claim for ourselves the right to change in a subjective way the holy signs which time has sifted, through which the Church speaks about herself, her identity and her faith!

The people of God has a right that can never be ignored, in virtue of which, all must be allowed to approach what is not merely the poor fruit of human effort, but the work of God, and precisely because it is God's work, a saving font of new life.

I wish to prolong my reflection a moment longer on this point, which, I can testify, is very dear to the Holy Father, by sharing with you a passage from *Sacramentum Caritatis*, the Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness, Benedict XVI, written after the Synod on the Holy Eucharist. "Emphasising the importance of the *ars celebrandi*," the Holy Father writes, "also leads to an appreciation of the value of the liturgical norms... The Eucharistic celebration is enhanced when priests and liturgical leaders are committed to making known the current liturgical texts and norms... Perhaps we take it for granted that our ecclesial communities already know and appreciate these resources, but this is not always the case. These texts contain riches which have preserved and expressed the faith and experience of the People of God over its two-thousand-year history." (n. 40)