

THE MASS AS THE BEGINNING OF HEAVEN ON EARTH – PART III

THE REFORMS FROM THE VATICAN II COUNCIL

AND THE SACRED OBJECTS USED DURING THE MASS

I. In Sacrosanctum Concilium, the Constitution on the Liturgy (1963), the Vatican II Council restated and elaborated on the theology of the Mass and other liturgies, and called for certain changes in how the Mass and other liturgies are celebrated, while respecting the ancient forms.

A. The introduction emphasizes that the liturgy, and especially the Mass, accomplishes here and now the eternal work of our redemption. It focused on the fact that, in the liturgy, as in the Church, the invisible and visible realms come together to bring us and the whole Church on this path to heaven.

B. Chapter I outlined the overall principles of the liturgical renewal.

1. Part I describes in vivid form how it is that the liturgy is the current work and prayer of Jesus Christ through His whole Church, in heaven and on earth, and how in the liturgy "we take part in the beginning of the heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims."

2. Part II focuses on promoting the full and active participation of the laity, the education of the laity in liturgy, and the careful training of clergy to celebrate the liturgy well and reverently. The silent implication in that such participation, education and training had been short of expectations in the past.

3. Part III states the general norms of reforming the liturgy that the Council based its actions on.

a. Section A points out that there are both changeable and unchangeable aspects of every liturgy. The document says that people should expect the changeable elements to be updated so to accommodate changing circumstances. It goes on to say that the Church universal, and to some degree, local authorities, have the authority to altar the changeable elements, and that no one else should presume to do so on their own. It also strikes a cautious note, saying that the

changes the Church makes should be careful and avoid unnecessary instability.

- It also outlines a central principle that the Council would emphasize, namely, the greater incorporation of the Word of God into liturgies.

b. Part B then describes how the liturgical books should clarify the roles of all of the people involved in the liturgy and promote the full and active participation of the laity.

c. Part C outlines ways in which the Council intends to increase pastoral and instruction value of the Mass and other liturgies, namely: (1) more of a noble simplicity in the liturgy; (2) a broader scope of Scriptural readings; (3) more emphasis on homilies and instruction generally; and (4) the increased use of vernacular languages in the liturgy, although the use of Latin is to be preserved.

d. Parts D, E and F then describe the application of the liturgical renewal to specific areas and dioceses. The documents authorizes certain approved variations among areas, and calls for each diocese to have offices promoting the rightful celebration of the liturgy and education of the public.

C. Chapter 2 then described the specific changes that the Council called for in the Mass, especially with regard to promoting the active, aware and devout participation of the laity.

1. There was to be the simplification of the liturgy, eliminating duplicative rites (e.g., the numerous signs of the cross and genuflections.)

2. The Mass would open up the full "treasures of the scriptures" so that the liturgy include readings from the complete course of the Bible over a set number of years. (Today the lectionary is set up to reflect a three year cycle for Sundays and a two year cycle for weekdays.)

3. There would be a greater emphasis on the homily and a restoration of the prayers of the faithful after the homily.

4. There would be a "suitable place for the vernacular language in the Mass," especially in the readings and common prayers of the faithful. The Council did say that the laity should be able to say or sing in Latin the standard Mass parts that are common to every Mass.

5. As the Council of Trent and Pope St. Pius X had done before, the Council recommended frequent Communion and authorized Communion under both species (bread and wine) for the faithful under regulation by the bishops.

6. Priests would be able to concelebrate Mass with other priests more often. (Before this time, concelebration was limited to Masses of ordination.)

D. Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the Divine Office and other liturgies.

E. Chapter 5 describes some changes in the liturgical year so that it would better "unfold the mystery of Christ from the Incarnation and Nativity to the Ascension, to Pentecost and the expectation of the blessed hope of the coming of the Lord. In particular, the Council upheld the notion of having special days for saint. But it also called for the number of saints days to be limited and generally subordinate to Sunday celebrations and the cycle of the liturgical year so that the year may better reflect salvation history. The Council also called for the full celebration of the Lenten season.

F. Chapter 6 discusses sacred music as a "treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art." In

particular, it called for: (1) more singing by the laity and more training in general for clergy and choirs in sacred music; (2) the preservation of Gregorian chant and the rich heritage of church music, along with some additions from specific culture, especially in mission lands, and the composition of new music that reflects the true faith for the people to participate in; and (3) the preservation of the pipe organ as central, with other instruments added for the edification of the people.

- G. Chapter 7 discusses sacred art and furnishings. It states that the Church does not adopt any one artistic style, but rather tries to take the best of every culture. However, the Council did lay down certain norms,
 - a. The art and furnishings in a church should "reflect noble beauty rather than sumptuous display."
 - b. There should be no works of art that are "repugnant to the faith," either because of decadent motifs or mediocre or pretentious styles.
 - c. The amount of artwork in a church should not be excessive, but rather be supportive of the liturgy. Likewise, the motive of church artists should be the glory of God and edification of the faithful, rather than personal glory.
 - d. There should be more education in sacred art, especially for the clergy.

II. After the Vatican II Council, the Church made numerous efforts to enact the reforms that the Council called for.

A. In 1965, the Vatican's Sacred Congregation on Rites published a revised missal that was like the pre-Vatican II Mass, but allowed such changes having much of the Mass in the vernacular language, allowing the priest to face the people (*versus populum*), simplifying Communion and including more singing by the laity. In addition, during the next four years, more vernacular in the Mass and extra options were added.

B. In 1970, Pope Paul VI approved of the new missal, called the *Novus Ordo Missae*. The resulting texts for both the prayers and readings at Mass were called the *Missale Romanum*. By 1973, the International Committee on English in the Liturgy, an international group chartered by the Vatican and the bishops' conferences of different countries, had translated the *Novus Ordo* into English.

C. Pope Paul VI authorized some additional changes in 1975 to form the *Missale Romanum alterum*. Those changes too were then incorporated into the translations of the Mass. In 1981, Pope John Paul II authorized a few additional changes to the readings.

D. The translation of the time, which would affect both the Sacramentary (the book containing the prayers of the Mass) and the Lectionary (the book that contains the Scriptural readings for the Mass) were based on principals popular at the time, but that the Vatican would later deem excessive.

1. At the time, a view that would come to be known as "dynamic equivalance" dominated much of the translation work. This view favors trying to convey the meaning of a text without using the phraseology that the original had. Thus, for example, the phrase in Latin "from the rising of the sun to its setting" would be rendered "from east to west." In addition, phrases or sentence would be moved around to make the flow easier in the vernacular (here English.) Formal equivalence, by contrast, tries to capture the actual phraseology of the translated text. The idea is that, in liturgy as in literature, one cannot separate the meaning of a text from the terms it uses.

2. In addition, there was an attempt to use language more common to the people. Thus, the Latin for "and also with your spirit" was translated "and also with you." Or, during the prayer just before communion, the Latin for "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed" was retranslated, "Lord I am not worthy to receive You, but only say the word and I shall be healed." The former phrase reflects the words of the centurion before Jesus' miraculous cure of his son, see Luke 7:6, while the second is more standard English.

E. In 1984, ICEL began efforts to retranslate the Sacramentary and the Lectionary. The process was very lengthy, and the results for the Sacramentary and Lectionary were different. By 1992, ICEL had approved a new translation of the Lectionary based upon the New American Bible translation. The Vatican wanted some changes, such as avoiding some of the "gender neutralization" particularly in reference to God, and maintaining Old Testament words that are associated

with the coming of Jesus (e.g., the translation of Isaiah's famous prophesy that "the virgin shall be with child" rather than "the young woman shall be with child." Is. 7:14; see Vatican Congregation on the Doctrine of the Faith, Norms for the Translation of Biblical Texts for use in the Liturgy (1997).

- F. The new translation of the Sacramentary took longer because the Vatican Congregation on Divine Worship and Sacraments rejected the first effort in 1997. In 2001, Pope John Paul II issued some revisions to the Mass, such as adding new memorials for saints and allowing more prayers with the option of Masses for Special Needs and Intentions.

- G. In 2001, the Congregation on Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments issued Liturgicam Authenticam, which outlined principles for translating liturgical texts into Latin. That document did not insist on formal equivalence, but did limit the use of dynamic equivalence by saying such things as, "The translator should strive to maintain the denotation, or primary sense of the words and expressions found in the original text, as well as their connotation, that is, the finer shades of meaning or emotion evoked by them, and thus to ensure that the text be open to other orders of meaning that may have been intended in the original text." LA 52. It also cautioned against gender neutralizing words that are not gender neutral in the Latin.

- H. In 2003, the same Congregation issued Redemptionis Sacramentum, which both insisted on fidelity to the instructions on celebrating Mass and clarified a few matters, such as the fact that concelebrating priests should wear chasubles, that chasubles should always cover the stole, and that it is legitimate to kneel or stand to receive Communion. The Congregation issued specific instructions for translations into English in 2007.

- I. With these documents, and with the help of a new Vatican commission called Vox Clara, ICEL produced a new

translation of the Sacramentary. Over the course of 2007-2009, the United States Conference on Catholic Bishops accepted the revised text. On April 28, 2010, the Vatican gave approval to those texts (with a few clarifications that were worked out over the next four months.) These new translations will be effective on the first Sunday of Advent, 2011.

III Various items used during the Mass reflect aspects of the sacrifice of the Mass.

A. The altar was, in ancient Israel, the place for sacrifices. Christ Himself fulfills those sacrifices, offering Himself up for our sins. See Heb. 9:11-26. The altar also represents Christ as the Living Stone of our salvation. See 1 Pet. 2:4; Eph. 2:20; General Instructions to the Roman Missal 298.

- Traditionally, there have been relics of the saints, especially martyrs, underneath the altar. Part of the idea is that they join in the sacrifice and celebration. See Rev. 6:9.
- Although it is no longer required, having the relics beneath the altar connects the worship of heaven and earth. See GIRM 301
- The altar traditionally faces east, reflecting both the symbolism of Jesus as the rising sun, and of the Mass as the first promise of the never-ending day of heaven. See Mal. 3:19-20; Luke 2:78. Many altars are in fact surrounded by an archway, reflecting the fact that in the Mass the gates of eternity are opened, both to the timeless sacrifice on Calvary, and to never-ending feast and worship of heaven.
- There is always at least a white altar cloth on the altar, representing the sacredness of the sacrifice that will take place there. There is always also a crucifix near the altar, showing the sacrifice of Christ that the Mass re-presents.
- The candles surrounding the altar reflect both Jesus as the light of the world, see John 1:3-5, 8:12, and the lights and lamp-stands at the beginning of the Book of Revelation that represent the churches and their angels that surround the Son of Man. See Rev. 1:12-13, 20.

B. The ambo (sometimes called a lectern) is the place where the readings and usually the intercessions are proclaimed. It should be fixed, representing the solidity of the word of God. See GIRM 309.

C. The sacred images in a church remind us of the connection between heaven and earth that the liturgy helps bring about. To avoid making the decorations central, rather than supportive, the Vatican II Council and the instructions to the Mass indicate that they should be ordered and numbered to focus on the liturgies, rather than become their own focus. GIRM 318.

D. The vestments mostly come from ancient Roman and Greek garments. But the notion of a priest wearing vestments reflects the ancient Israeli priests' vestments. See Ex. 28; 39:1-31. In addition, the symbolic value attached to them reflects Christian virtues.

1. The alb is the white robe that is worn by the priest and deacon and can be worn by anyone else involved in the liturgy. It reflects the holiness received at baptism and meant to continue throughout life, being fully conferred upon the saints. See Rev. 3:5; 7:9-10.

- A prayer that goes alongside vesting with the alb is "Purify me, O Lord, from all stain and cleanse my heart that, washed in the Blood of the Lamb, I may enjoy eternal delights."

2. The amice, the cloth that goes around the neck underneath the alb represents the helmet of salvation meant that wards off attacks of the enemy. Eph. 6:17; 1 Thess. 5:18. See also Is. 59:8.

- A prayer that goes alongside the amice is "Place, O Lord, on my head the helmet of salvation that I may overcome the assaults of the devil."

3. The alb, along with the amice, worn by a priest or deacon should cover him from shoulders to foot, representing the integrity of a life totally consecrated to God.

4. The cincture, the rope that the priest wears as a belt, represents the chastity and self-control fitting for one who ministers at the altar. See, e.g., Dan. 10:5 (a figure, apparently the angel Gabriel, wearing a belt of gold); 1 Tim 4:7-12.

- A prayer that goes alongside of the cincture is "Gird me, Lord, with the cincture of purity, and quench in my heart the fire of concupiscence, that the virtue of continence and chastity may remain in me."

5. The stole represents the authority of a priest (or deacon.). See Ex 28:4 (referring to a sash worn by priests); Rev. 1:13 (Jesus in glory wearing a sash of gold.) The stole is used for the actions that are specific to a cleric's office, especially Mass, all sacraments, other liturgies and blessings.

- Currently, for a priest in the Latin rite, the stole hangs down evenly on both sides. For a deacon, it goes from left to right. The two sides of the stole represent the burden of office, as well as such mysteries as the two natures of Christ.

- A prayer that goes alongside of the stole is "Restore to me, O Lord, the state of immortality, which was lost by my first parents and, although unworthy to approach Your sacred mysteries, grant me, nevertheless, eternal joy."

6. The chasuble worn by the priest represents charity covering all things. Col 3:12-13.

A prayer that goes alongside vesting with the chasuble is "O Lord, You said, 'My Yoke is easy and my burden light.' Grant that I may carry it so as to obtain Your grace."

C. The idea of having sacred vessels made of gold or silver comes from the ancient Jewish practice of using gold vessels for the sacrifices in the Temple. See, e.g., 1 Kings 7:48-50.

D. The incense that can be used at Mass reflects both the offering of prayers to God by the saints, and the cloud that surrounds the presence of God, e.g., at Mount Sinai, the dedication of the Temple, and the Transfiguration. See Ex. 19:9, 16-20; 1 Kings 19:2, 8-14; Matt. 17:1-13; Mark 9:-8; Luke 9:28-36; Rev. 8:3.