

Inaugurazione Anno Accademico, Ateneo Sant'Anselmo, 2021-2022
Prolusione Accademica di SER Mons Arthur Roche, Prefetto Congregazione
per il Culto Divino e la Disciplina dei Sacramenti
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English translation:

“In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy”

(Sacrosanctum Concilium n. 8)

*The study of the liturgy as an ecclesial service
for a renewed spirituality*

I stand before you today, not simply as the Prefect of Divine Worship & Discipline of the Sacraments, but also as a bishop of 20 years, half of which as the bishop with responsibility for a diocese, as a priest of 46 years and as a Catholic who, as a young man, straddled the pre and post Vatican II eras. I am above all a disciple of Christ just like all of you, who serves the Lord. It is solely based on these credentials that I dare to address you.

Most importantly, I would like to be a source of encouragement to you at the beginning of this new academic year. First of all, because the studies that you undertake are vitally important for the life and health of the Church. I mention the health of the Church because we have need for people who are well prepared and balanced, who love the Church as she is!

Secondly, I want you to be true men and women of the Church who *sentire cum Ecclesia* and not to be waylaid by ecclesiastical ideologies or by your own preferences, or novel ideas or a desire to mould the Church in your image, but by what the Church is calling you to be today – her missionaries in a new age with a clear task in hand. As a prerequisite, I recommend to you to be attentive to the long and fascinating history of the 150 years of the liturgical movement prior to the Second Vatican Council, and to the choices made there by the Council Fathers and the reasons for those choices, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In the words of Pope Francis, “Pope saint Paul VI himself, a year before his death, said to the Cardinals gathered in Consistory: “The time has now come to definitively leave aside divisive elements, which are equally pernicious in both senses, and to apply fully, in accordance with the correct criteria that inspired it, the reform approved by Us in the application of the wishes of the Council”.¹ Pope Francis continues,

¹“The Pope’s attention is drawn today once more to a particular point of the Church’s life: the indisputably beneficial fruits of the liturgical reform. Since the promulgation of the Conciliar Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* great progress has taken place,

“There is still work to be done in this direction, in particular by rediscovering the reasons for the decisions taken with regard to the liturgical reform, by overcoming unfounded and superficial readings, a partial reception, and practices that disfigure it [...] After this magisterium, after this long journey, We can affirm with certainty and with magisterial authority that the liturgical reform is irreversible.”² Be men and women, scholars and masters of your various scientific endeavours, yes, but above all faithful disciples who build up the Church and are not the cause of its fragmentation. Saint John Henry Newman offers us a wise caution when he wrote: “We can believe what we choose. We are answerable for what we choose to believe.”³

Thirdly, I want to encourage you to profit personally at a deep spiritual level through all that you learn here in this great Institution. It is that personal experience *coram Christo* that will give life to all you study, reflect upon and do and will prepare you for the future. Pope Saint Paul VI recalled this imperative when he outlined the first steps of the liturgical reform: “It is good that it be perceived as the very authority of the Church to wish, to promote, to ignite this new manner of prayer, thus greatly increasing her spiritual mission [...]; and we must not hesitate to first become disciples then supporters of the school of prayer, which is about to begin.”⁴

An important influence for me personally has been through my involvement, during the past 20 years, in the various translations of the *Missale Romanum editio typica tertia*. It has become for me a journey of immense

progress that responds to the premises laid down by the liturgical movement of the last part of the nineteenth century. It has fulfilled that movement’s deep aspirations for which so many churchmen and scholars have worked and prayed. The new Rite of the Mass, promulgated by Us after long and painstaking preparation by the competent bodies, and into which other Eucharistic Praises have been introduced alongside the Roman Canon, which remains substantially unchanged, has borne blessed fruits. These include a greater participation in the liturgical action, a more lively awareness of the sacred action, a greater and wider knowledge of the inexhaustible treasures of Sacred Scripture and an increasing sense of community in the Church. The results of these recent years show that we are on the right path. But unfortunately, in spite of the vast preponderance of the healthy and positive action of the clergy and the faithful, abuses have been committed and liberties have been taken in applying the liturgical reform. The time has now come to definitively leave aside divisive elements, which are equally pernicious in both senses, and to apply fully, in accordance with the correct criteria that inspired it, the reform approved by Us in the application of the wishes of the Council” (Allocution *Gratias Ex Animo*, 27 June 1977: Teachings of Paul vi, xv [1977], 655-656, in Italian 662-663).

² *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the 68th National Liturgical Week in Italy, 24 August 2017*

³ Letter to Mrs William Froude, 27 June 1848

⁴ General Audience 13 January 1965

discovery and personal renewal, which continues to this day. It unlocked for me the vast treasures contained in the prayers and texts of the Roman Rite which are deeply saturated with the theological traditions of our faith and which have been handed on to us with such great care by the Church in the Latin language and which are now available in the vernacular.

What this exercise brought to light, in a way that I had not fully appreciated previously, was that these prayers, these texts, were not simply the creation of a fine mind or a single pen, but came from God's own hand through the rich biblical and patristic patrimony that we find there, together with the profound teaching of the Church's understanding of herself as found in the Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*. This patrimony connects us with the Church's faith as expressed throughout the ages and which is pertinent for our time and mission. As we know, the *Missale Romanum* of Pope Saint Paul VI is the richest Missal that the Church has ever produced together with its *Missale Romanum Lectionarium*. It is always important to note that the Roman Missal comes in four volumes.⁵

Almost sixty years on from the Second Vatican Council, it can rightly be said that the vision contained not only in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, but also in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, has now become more evident in the Church's prayer and in her consciousness, through a new awakening of the Sacred Scriptures in the Roman Rite. What an enrichment this is for the Church! It was rightly said of Saint Bernard of Clairveaux that he knew the scriptures so well that he spoke biblically. To know the prayers of the Missal is to begin to learn how to pray scripturally, which is such a precious gift to God's faithful people, which brings with it the seeds of renewal.

The translation of these texts, therefore, is of immense importance. Of course, when it comes to translation there are many theories and controversies. If waylaid by that, it can be a battlefield of contrasting and opposing opinions. Even the most inexperienced of protagonists have their opinions and can be highly vocal and self-opinionated. The old adage of being able to negotiate with terrorists but not with liturgists can take on an all too real an aspect, but we should be consoled by Saint Paul's Second Letter to Timothy where he writes:

Remind them of this, and charge them before the Lord to avoid disputing about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. Do your best to present

⁵ *Missale Romanum* and the *Missale Romanum Lectionarium* vol I, II, III (LEV 1970)

*yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.*⁶

The Roman Missal is not the creation of a single person nor is it born of one particular source or preferential option. It is the faith of the Church, which constantly needs to be underlined; it encapsulates this in the rightful 'handling [of] the word of truth', as noted by Saint Paul.

Cardinal Hans Urs von Balthasar put it this way:

"No liturgy designed by men could be "worthy of the subject of their homage of God at whose throne the heavenly choirs prostrate themselves with covered faces, having cast off their crowns and ornaments before offering adoration. The attempt to return to him who "created all according to his will" the honour that all creatures received must, a priori, compel to its knees an earthly community of sinners. 'Domine, non sum dignus!' If such a community, meeting for praise and worship, should have anything else in mind than adoration and self-oblation – for example, self-development or any other project in which they place themselves thematically in context next to the Lord who is to be worshipped – then they naïvely deceive themselves. This topic can be touched only with fear and trembling."⁷

Cardinal Basil Hume OSB., Archbishop of Westminster, wrote at the publication of a joint statement by the Episcopal Conferences of the British Isles on the Eucharist, entitled "One Bread, One Body":

"What do Catholics believe about the Eucharist? When, in distributing Holy Communion, the priest says to me 'The Body of Christ', I answer 'Amen'. ... My 'Amen' expresses not only my faith in the Body of Christ which is the Eucharist but also my faith in the Body of Christ which is the Church. The Eucharist and the Church are inseparably bound together."⁸

In other words, it is in the Eucharist that we find the genetic code of the Church.

⁶ 2 Timothy 2:14-16

⁷ H.U. von Balthasar, "The Grandeur of the Liturgy", *Communio* 5, no.4 (1978), 344 (cf. footnote 15)

⁸ Comment of Cardinal Basil Hume at the launch of *One Bread One Body*, a joint statement of the Bishops' Conferences of England & Wales, Ireland and Scotland, 30 September 1998.

Amongst the many facets that constitute Catholic liturgy there are two dimensions of which we should never lose sight as they describe the very nature of the Church. The first of course is that, as Catholics, we are, here and now, united to every other Catholic throughout the world, and through our local bishop, we are united to the Pope, the Successor of Saint Peter. This connection marks and guarantees our belonging, without which we are alone, outside the community founded by Christ and built on the Apostle Peter. So, it is never a matter of this or that community or group alone; when we celebrate the liturgy we are bound together in the Body of Christ and bring all our brothers and sisters to the Altar through the prayer which is essentially Christ's.

But, there is also another important dimension to our liturgy. In the Church we are also united to all the people of faith who ever lived and believed, and all the Catholics who will ever live and believe in the future. We might speak of the synchronic dimension of liturgy as uniting the whole Church around the world, and of the diachronic dimension as running through time into eternity. Following the first vernacular publications of the *Missale Romanum* after 1970, many thought that insufficient attention had been paid to this diachronic dimension. The new translations, I believe, correct this and improve the translated texts. The work of translating is challenging; remaining faithful to the original text and expressing it in the receiving language needs great care and biblical, patristic and theological insight and delicacy. We have to keep always in mind what St Paul said to the Church in Corinth, "I received from the Lord what I in turn passed on to you."⁹ He was speaking to a Church that was troubled by liturgical discord.

Whenever we assemble for the celebration of the Eucharist, we are not simply gathering as this community from this particular place, but we stand at the crossroads of all life and on the very threshold where time intersects with eternity – our gathering is greater than what the eye can see. We are entering into the mystery of Christ who, because of the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery, makes possible the flow or the 'passage of time' to enter into the 'always of eternity' and to be lifted up and transformed. Saint Irenaeus says: "He took up humanity into himself, the invisible becoming visible, the incomprehensible being made comprehensible."¹⁰

⁹ 1 Cor 11:23

¹⁰ Against Heresies 3:16.6

The *Graduale Romanum* of 1973 gives the Introit for the Common of the Dedication of a Church as *Terribilis est locus iste*.¹¹ It indicates that this particular chant is most appropriate when the celebration of the Mass takes place in the church itself.¹² This highly evocative text is from Genesis 28 (17,22):

“Terribilis est locus iste: hic domus Dei est, et porta coeli: et vocabitur aula Dei.”¹³

This is not simply an allusion to a building or a place as *the gate of heaven*, it is also the living stones, the Church. At the same time, the liturgy which is celebrated within a building or place by a particular community, is described as a “foretaste of that heavenly liturgy.” The liturgy is the privileged place where two worlds meet. This theological notion about the nature of our liturgical celebration - an intuition of the Council Fathers expressed in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* - is so evident that it was also included in the "Catechism of the Catholic Church" as a description of the liturgy itself. There, we read:

“In the earthly liturgy we share in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle. With all the warriors of the heavenly army we sing a hymn of glory to the Lord; venerating the memory of the saints, we hope for some part and fellowship with them; we eagerly await the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, until he, our life, shall appear and we too will appear with him in glory.”¹⁴

At a later stage, the idea is taken up again with no less force, where we read:

¹¹ *Graduale Romanum*, Introit Common of the Dedication of a Church (in the Church itself) p. 397

¹² Surprisingly this does not find a place in the Mass for the Dedication of a Church as it is given in the current edition of the *Missale Romanum*, despite the fact that this Scriptural text has long been associated with this particular celebration.

¹³ “This place is awesome (breath taking, if you like): it is the house of God, the gate of heaven and shall be called God’s church.”

¹⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Geoffrey Chapman (London, 1994) article 1090, p.250

“To the offering of Christ are united not only the members still here on earth, but also those already in the glory of heaven. In communion with and commemorating the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints, the Church offers the Eucharistic sacrifice. In the Eucharist the Church is as it were at the foot of the cross with Mary, united with the offering and intercession of Christ.”¹⁵

There is no lack of clarity in the expression of this important idea, which is an unambiguous challenge to any ‘mono-dimensional’ view of liturgy, which amounts to a considerable misunderstanding of what is taking place when we gather to worship as envisaged by the Second Vatican Council.

Many liturgical misunderstandings of the past and present can be traced to a failure to acknowledge this characteristic, which clearly should be evident in all Catholic liturgy.

The reform of the liturgy as captured in the *Missale Romanum* is and remains our guide for understanding and implementing a correct appreciation of the liturgy. The “Catechism of the Catholic Church” can help us. Paragraphs 1179-1186 take up the theme of “Where is the Liturgy Celebrated?” and draws our attention to parallel truths indicating that liturgy is celebrated both on earth and in heaven. Furthermore, it emphasizes that when we celebrate the Liturgy, we are made present to the mystery and the mystery is made present to us. In this way, the liturgy draws together the two distinct levels of reality: heaven and earth become heaven on earth. As the words of the Preface for the Dedication of a Church has it:

“Hic veri Templi adumbratur mysterium,
Et caelestis Ierusalem praenotatur imago.”¹⁶

Again, it is the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy that helps us to synthesise these dimensions:

“[Liturgy is] both human and divine, visible and yet invisibly equipped, eager to act and yet intent on contemplation, present in this world and yet not at home in it; and she is all these things in such wise

¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* Geoffrey Chapman (London, 1994) article 1370, p.308

¹⁶ *Missale Romanum, In Dedicationis Ecclesiae et Altaris*, p1063 (Here is foreshadowed the mystery of the true Temple, here is prefigured the heavenly Jerusalem).

that in her the human is directed and subordinated to the divine, the visible likewise to the invisible, action to contemplation, and this present world to that city yet to come, which we seek [Cfr. Hebr. 13, 14]."¹⁷

- The earthly liturgy that takes place in the spatio-temporal coordinates makes visible, here and now, the supernatural and eternal reality of the mystery of God.
- By *signa sensibilia*,¹⁸ and *per ritus et preces*,¹⁹ the earthly liturgy already contains and communicates the ontological reality of the heavenly liturgy which is a person: Christ himself.
- What distinguishes the earthly liturgy from the heavenly one is not the content, but the way in which it is experienced: on earth through the veil of the symbolic language of the sacraments, in heaven in the fullness of truth (the ἀ-λήθεια = unveiling) of glory.

In the celebration of the Mass, the temporal and the eternal realities are united: our own offering is taken up into Christ's self-offering and is eternally identified with it. In this, the Eucharist is a natural fulfilment of our Baptism, by which we are incorporated forever into the mystery of Christ's suffering, death and resurrection.²⁰ In a very real sense, we can say that in the celebration of the Liturgy heaven and earth are united and no longer separated. What the introit *Terribilis est* says for the building that is dedicated, we can repeat for the Liturgy: *terribilis est locus iste*, this place inspires respect, sacred fear because what happens in our midst is truly awesome, *fascinans et tremendum*, which attracts and frightens, for God is present among us. Against the background of our earthly existence, we encounter the transcendence of God who is the supreme object of our worship. I wish to underline that this aspect is of vital importance.

Your studies, your scrutiny and knowledge of the liturgical books and sources, your discipleship in faithfulness to Christ and his Church and her teaching, are of immense importance. How often I hear people expressing personal and erroneous opinions, interpretations that have long failed to express the reality! They conjure up and expound theories and facts that have no foundation. It must be said repeatedly that the liturgy is life and not simply an idea to be understood. All of us, who have a great responsibility for the liturgy and train those who will inherit this responsibility in the future,

¹⁷ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n.2

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, n.7

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, n.48

²⁰ Cf. Rm 6:4

are called simply to perform a service, aware of our smallness.²¹ We are not creating or reforming the liturgy; that has already been done by the Church's highest authority, an Ecumenical Council. Our responsibility is to implement that reform in faithfulness to what we have received and not to be promoting things which are not of the mind of the Church even if loudly expressed.

Fifty years has passed since the publication of the *Missale Romanum*. It is an opportune moment to recapture the wisdom and the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and allow its Constitution on the Liturgy to inform our studies and lead us to a greater and deeper understanding. In particular, I would suggest by becoming more fully conversant with an understanding of the content of meaning of the euchological texts, without forgetting the symbolic value of the anthropological dimension of ritual gestures. This requires a careful and accurate study of the texts in their original form in Latin. It is a matter of practising a research method that is scientifically rigorous, that starts from a serious philological analysis, based on a historico-critical reconstruction of euchology that allows us to arrive at a correct liturgical theology. The Pontifical Athenaeum of Saint Anselm is an expert in this method, thus offering its own contribution to the care and promotion of the liturgy according to the renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council.

In conclusion, I wish all of you, professors and students, a good academic year, the love of the Lord you serve, a humble perseverance, and above all a good sense of humour.

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²¹ Lk 17:10