

Tridentine Community News

January 31, 2010

Introduction to the Spirit of the Liturgy by Msgr. Guido Marini, Part 1 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 selected 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 present his speech in its entirety.

I propose to focus on some topics connected to the spirit of the liturgy and reflect on them with you; indeed, I intend to broach a subject which would require me to say much. Not only because it is a demanding and complex task to talk about the spirit of the liturgy, but also because many important works treating this subject have already been written by authors of unquestionably high caliber in theology and the liturgy. I'm thinking of two people in particular among the many: Romano Guardini and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger.

One the other hand, it is now all the more necessary to speak about the spirit of the liturgy, especially for us members of the sacred priesthood. Moreover, there is an urgent need to reaffirm the "authentic" spirit of the liturgy, such as it is present in the uninterrupted tradition of the Church, and attested, in continuity with the past, in the most recent Magisterial teachings: starting from the Second Vatican Council up to the present pontificate. I purposefully used the word continuity, a word very dear to our present Holy Father. He has made it the only authoritative criterion whereby one can correctly interpret the life of the Church, and more specifically, the conciliar documents, including all the proposed reforms contained in them. How could it be any different? Can one truly speak of a Church of the past and a Church of the future as if some historical break in the body of the Church had occurred? Could anyone say that the Bride of Christ had lived without the assistance of the Holy Spirit in a particular period of the past, so that its memory should be erased, purposefully forgotten?

Nevertheless at times it seems that some individuals are truly partisan to a way of thinking that is justly and properly defined as an ideology, or rather a preconceived notion applied to the history of the Church which has nothing to do with the true faith.

An example of the fruit produced by that misleading ideology is the recurrent distinction between the pre Conciliar and the post Conciliar Church. Such a manner of speaking can be legitimate, but only on condition that two Churches are not understood by it: one, the pre Conciliar Church, that has nothing more to say or to give because it has been surpassed, and a second, the post Conciliar Church, a new reality born from the Council and, by its presumed spirit, not in continuity with its past. This manner of speaking and more so of thinking must not be our own. Apart from being incorrect, it is already superseded and outdated, perhaps

understandable from a historical point of view, but nonetheless connected to a season in the Church's life by now concluded.

Does what we have discussed so far with respect to "continuity" have anything to do with the topic we have been asked to treat in this lecture? Yes, absolutely. The authentic spirit of the liturgy does not abide when it is not approached with serenity, leaving aside all polemics with respect to the recent or remote past. The liturgy cannot and must not be an opportunity for conflict between those who find good only in that which came before us, and those who, on the contrary, almost always find wrong in what came before. The only disposition which permits us to attain the authentic spirit of the liturgy, with joy and true spiritual relish, is to regard both the present and the past liturgy of the Church as one patrimony in continuous development. A spirit, accordingly, which we must receive from the Church and is not a fruit of our own making. A spirit, I add, which leads to what is essential in the liturgy, or, more precisely, to prayer inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit, in whom Christ continues to become present for us today, to burst forth into our lives. Truly, the spirit of the liturgy is the liturgy of the Holy Spirit.

I will not pretend to plumb the depths of the proposed subject matter, nor to treat all the different aspects necessary for a panoramic and comprehensive understanding of the question. I will limit myself by discussing only a few elements essential to the liturgy, specifically with reference to the celebration of the Eucharist, such as the Church proposes them, and in the manner I have learned to deepen my knowledge of them these past two years in service to our Holy Father, Benedict XVI. He is an authentic master of the spirit of the liturgy, whether by his teaching, or by the example he gives in the celebration of the sacred rites.

If, during the course of these reflections on the essence of the liturgy, I will find myself taking note of some behaviours that I do not consider in complete harmony with the authentic spirit of the liturgy, I will do so only as a small contribution to making this spirit stand out all the more in all its beauty and truth.

1. The Sacred Liturgy, God's great gift to the Church.

We are all well aware how the second Vatican Council dedicated the entirety of its first document to the liturgy: *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. It was labeled as the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.

I wish to underline the term sacred in its application to the liturgy, because of its importance. As a matter of fact, the council Fathers intended in this way to reinforce the sacred character of the liturgy.