

Tridentine Community News

March 7, 2010

Introduction to the Spirit of the Liturgy by Msgr. Guido Marini, Part 5 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.

4. Active Participation.

It was really the saints who have celebrated and lived the liturgical act by participating actively. Holiness, as the result of their lives, is the most beautiful testimony of a participation truthfully active in the liturgy of the Church.

Rightly, then, and by Divine Providence did the Second Vatican Council insist so much on the necessity of promoting an authentic participation on the part of the faithful during the celebration of the Holy Mysteries, at the same time when it reminded the Church of the universal call to holiness. This authoritative direction from the Council has been confirmed and proposed again and again by so many successive documents of the magisterium down to the present day.

Nevertheless, there has not always been a correct understanding of the concept of "active participation", according to how the Church teaches it and exhorts the faithful to live it. To be sure, there is active participation when, during the course of the liturgical celebration, one fulfills his proper service; there is active participation too when one has a better comprehension of God's word when it is heard or of the prayers when they are said; there is also active participation when one unites his own voice to that of the others in song....All this, however, would not signify a participation truthfully active if it did not lead to adoration of the Mystery of salvation in Christ Jesus, who for our sake died and is risen. This is because only he who adores the Mystery, welcoming it into his life, demonstrates that he has comprehended what is being celebrated, and so is truly participating in the grace of the liturgical act.

As confirmation and support for what has just been asserted, let us listen once again to the words of a passage by the then Cardinal Ratzinger, from his fundamental study "The Spirit of the Liturgy": "What does this active participation come down to? What does it mean that we have to do? Unfortunately the word was very quickly misunderstood to mean something external, entailing a need for general activity, as if as many people as possible, as often as possible, should be visibly engaged in action. However, the word 'participation' refers to a principal action in which everyone has a 'part'...By the actio of the liturgy the sources mean the Eucharistic prayer. The real liturgical action, the true liturgical act, is the oratio....This oratio—the Eucharistic Prayer, the "Canon"—is really more than speech; it is actio in the highest sense of the word." (pp. 171-2) Christ is made present in all of His salvific work, and for this

reason the human actio becomes secondary and makes room for the divine actio, to God's work.

Thus the true action which is carried out in the liturgy is the action of God Himself, His saving work in Christ, in which we participate. This is, among other things, the true novelty of the Christian liturgy with respect to every other act of worship: God Himself acts and accomplishes that which is essential, whilst man is called to open himself to the activity of God, in order to be left transformed. Consequently, the essential aspect of active participation is to overcome the difference between God's act and our own, that we might become one with Christ. This is why, that I might stress what has been said up to now, it is not possible to participate without adoration. Let us listen to another passage from Sacrosanctum Concilium: "The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. They should be instructed by God's Word and be nourished at the table of the Lord's Body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn also to offer themselves; through Christ the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all." (n. 48)

Compared to this, everything else is secondary. I am referring in particular to external actions, granted they be important and necessary, and foreseen above all during the Liturgy of the Word. I mention the external actions because, should they become the essential preoccupation and the liturgy is reduced to a generic act, in that case the authentic spirit of the liturgy has been misunderstood. It follows that an authentic education in the liturgy cannot consist simply in learning and practicing exterior actions, but in an introduction to the essential action, which is God's own, the Paschal Mystery of Christ, whom we must allow to meet us, to involve us, to transform us. Let not the mere execution of external gestures be confused with the correct involvement of our bodies in the liturgical act. Without taking anything away from the meaning and importance of the external action which accompanies the interior act, the Liturgy demands a lot more from the human body.

It requires, in fact, its total and renewed effort in the daily actions of this life. This is what the Holy Father, Benedict XVI calls "Eucharistic coherence". Properly speaking, it is the timely and faithful exercise of such a coherence or consistency which is the most authentic expression of participation, even bodily, in the liturgical act, the salvific action of Christ.