

Tridentine Community News

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

I wish to discuss this point further. Are we truly certain that the promotion of an active participation consists in rendering everything to the greatest extent possible immediately comprehensible? May it not be the case that entering into God's Mystery might be facilitated and, sometimes, even better accompanied by that which touches principally the reasons of the heart? Is it not often the case that a disproportionate amount of space is given over to empty and trite speech, forgetting that both dialogue and silence belong in the liturgy, congregational singing and choral music, images, symbols, gestures? Do not, perhaps, also the Latin language, Gregorian Chant, and sacred polyphony belong to this manifold language which conducts us to the center of the mystery?

5. Sacred or liturgical music.

There is no doubt that a discussion, in order to introduce itself authentically into the spirit of the liturgy, cannot pass over sacred or liturgical music in silence.

I will limit myself to a brief reflection in way of orienting the discussion. One might wonder why the Church by means of its documents, more or less recent, insists in indicating a certain type of music and singing as particularly consonant with the liturgical celebration. Already at the time of the Council of Trent the Church intervened in the cultural conflict developing at that time, reestablishing the norm whereby music conforming to the sacred text was of primary importance, limiting the use of instruments and pointing to a clear distinction between profane and sacred music. Sacred music, moreover, must never be understood as a purely subjective expression. It is anchored to the biblical or traditional texts which are to be sung during the course of the celebration. More recently, Pope Saint Pius X intervened in an analogous way, seeking to remove operatic singing from the liturgy and selecting Gregorian Chant and polyphony from the time of the Catholic reformation as the standard for liturgical music, to be distinguished from religious music in general. The second Vatican Council did nought but reaffirm the same standard, so too the more recent magisterial documents.

Why does the Church insist on proposing certain forms as characteristic of sacred and liturgical music which make them distinct from all other forms of music? Why, also, do Gregorian Chant and the classical sacred polyphony turn out to be the forms to be imitated, in light of which liturgical and even popular music should continue to be produced today?

The answer to these questions lies precisely in what we have sought to assert with regard to the spirit of the liturgy. It is properly those forms of music, in their holiness, their goodness, and their universality, which translate in notes, melodies, and singing the authentic liturgical spirit: by leading to adoration of the mystery celebrated, by favouring an authentic and integral participation, by helping the listener to capture the sacred and thereby the essential primacy of God acting in Christ, and finally by permitting a musical development that is anchored in the life of the Church and the contemplation of its mystery.

Allow me to quote the then Cardinal Ratzinger one last time: "Gandhi highlights three vital spaces in the cosmos, and demonstrates how each one of them communicates even its own mode of being. Fish live in the sea and are silent. Terrestrial animals cry out, but the birds, whose vital space is the heavens, sing. Silence is proper to the sea, crying out to the earth, and singing to the heavens. Man, however, participates in all three: he bares within him the depth of the sea, the weight of the earth, and the height of the heavens; this is why all three modes of being belong to him: silence, crying out, and song. Today...we see that, devoid of transcendence, all that is left to man is to cry out, because he wishes to be only earth and seeks to turn into earth even the heavens and the depth of the sea. The true liturgy, the liturgy of the Communion of Saints, restores to him the fullness of his being. It teaches him anew how to be silent and how to sing, opening to him the profundity of the sea and teaching him how to fly, the nature of an angel; elevating his heart, it makes that song resonate in him once again which had in a way fallen asleep. In fact, we can even say that the true liturgy is recognisable especially when it frees us from the common way of living, and restores to us depth and height, silence, and song. The true liturgy is recognisable by the fact that it is cosmic, not custom made for a group. It sings with the angels. It remains silent with the profound depth of the universe in waiting. And in this way it redeems the world." (trans. from the Italian.)

At this point I would like to conclude the discussion. For some years now, several voices have been heard within Church circles talking about the necessity of a new liturgical renewal. Of a movement, in some ways analogous to the one which formed the basis for the reform promoted by the second Vatican Council, capable of operating a reform of the reform, or rather, one more step ahead in understanding the authentic spirit of the liturgy and of its celebration; its goal would be to carry on that providential reform of the liturgy that the conciliar Fathers had launched but has not always, in its practical implementation, found a timely and happy fulfillment.

There is no doubt that in this new liturgical renewal it is we priests who are to recover a decisive role. With the help of our Lord and the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of all priests, may this further development of the reform also be the fruit of our sincere love for the liturgy, in fidelity to the Church and the Holy Father.