

**THE
COUNCIL**

**AND
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LITURGY**

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REVEREND

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NATIONAL CATHOLIC WELFARE CONFERENCE

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A Commentary on the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

by

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I THE COUNCIL'S FIRST ACT

By enacting the Second Vatican Council's first document, the Constitution on worship or liturgy, Pope Paul VI and the other bishops made concrete Pope John's goal in summoning the council—to renew the Church, to bring the Church's ways up to date.

The liturgical constitution went into effect for the whole Church on February 16, 1964, the first Sunday of Lent; the waiting period was to enable clergy and faithful to become acquainted with the Council's statement. The importance of reading and studying the document is obvious. In it the Council's motives and plans are made perfectly clear.

This lengthy document—it runs to more than 12,000 words—is the real beginning of reform within the Church. It affects the

single occasion when Catholics come together every week, the Sunday morning Mass. It confronts what has been called the “Sunday morning crisis”—congregations that are uninvolved or indifferent, rites that are routine or unintelligible.

Four hundred years to the day after the 1563 closing of the Council of Trent, Pope Paul and the other Fathers of the present Council decreed and issued this new Constitution. The historical parallel goes deeper.

On December 4, 1563, the bishops at Trent entrusted to the pope the task of revising the official missal—and thus revising the Mass text and rites.

On December 4, 1963, a similar but much broader revision was initiated, this time with careful directives and explanations of the reasons for the renewal.

The Constitution spells out clearly the mind of the Church concerning the renewal of its public worship. But the practically minded have an immediate question about the Constitution’s effects: How soon can we expect all the Mass texts to be in English? How soon can we expect the revision of the sacramental rites?

Part of the answer—the time element—involves risky speculation. A better answer is to describe the Council’s legislation on the liturgy under four rough headings:

(1) *Doctrinal*. Each of the seven chapters of the Constitution on worship has an important doctrinal introduction. In the first chapter, for example, there is a fundamental section on the nature of public worship and its significance in the Church’s whole life. The Council explains that the liturgy continues Christ’s priestly action in all the members of the Church, how Christ acts in every liturgical celebration, that “the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fount from which all her power flows.”

The faithful, says the Council, “must be convinced that the pre-eminent manifestation of the Church consists in the full active participation of all God’s holy people in these liturgical celebrations,

especially in the same Eucharist, in a single prayer, at one altar, at which there presides the bishop surrounded by his college of priests and by his ministers." In similar language the other sacraments, the daily prayer or office, and the Church year are explained.

All this, amounting in text to perhaps one-third of the document, should become the ordinary teaching of the Church without delay. There was no "waiting period" until it became true or went into effect. Rather it sums up and crystallizes Catholic doctrine on sacred worship; it should be the starting point for priests and teachers in their explanation of the Church as a worshiping community.

(2) *Disciplinary*. Under this heading come the norms which became effective on February 16, 1964. They demand the instruction of the people and their full participation in the liturgy now, irrespective of future changes or the introduction of the vernacular languages into worship; they give directions for revised seminary training, so that both studies and spiritual life will center about the mystery of Christ the Lord celebrated in the liturgy, for the training of priests already in the ministry, for the work of diocesan liturgical commissions. In some cases, the regulations are specific, insisting, for example, on the preaching of sermons at all Sunday and holyday Masses when the people are present, commending preaching at Masses on other days, etc.

While the natural tendency is to look ahead to changes and reforms, the task of liturgical education and liturgical participation is immediate, and much of the Constitution from the Council deals with such promotion, because "Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy."

(3) *Episcopal*. Much has been written about the authority of the groups of bishops in the different countries, regions, or territories of the world. The liturgy Constitution changes the rule of the past which reserved the regulation of public worship rather strictly to the Holy See.

The most important instance of this affects the use of the mother tongues in the liturgy. Such concessions have been made

by the Council itself, but only on condition that the bodies of bishops, acting collectively, take advantage of the concession for their respective territory. Thus these provisions of the Constitution did not go into effect immediately, but only when the bishops take action.

So far as the United States is concerned, a preliminary announcement was made at once. The American bishops agreed, before leaving Rome after the Council session, to adopt and accept the Constitution's concessions in the matter of language. A general meeting of the Bishops was later held, on April 2, 1964, in Washington, when formal approval was decreed for official English translations of liturgical texts.

(4) *Papal*. The final category comprises the Council's mandate directed not to the Church at large but to a commission which was set up by the Pope (in January of 1964) to revise the missal, breviary, ritual, etc. The Council has decided the principles and the chief points; the implementation must wait until details are worked out.

Here conjecture is almost useless. It is easy to predict the kinds of changes in the rite of Mass or in the sacramental services; these are clearly indicated in the Constitution or in the writings of experts. What is uncertain is the length of time needed: only a few months for broad changes, certainly several years for the complete revision of the service books of the liturgy.

The whole picture of the Council's liturgical renewal may be quickly summed up. Its doctrine on worship should be studied and preached now. Its discipline took effect on February 16, 1964, above all in the active participation of the people. Two aspects of the Constitution require additional action: the use of the vernacular depends on the body of bishops of each nation; the ritual reform depends on precise decisions to be made by authority of the Pope.

In quantity and quality the norms of the Constitution on liturgical instruction and activity are even more important than the reform. They are at the root of all efforts to renew the Church's spirit.

II

THE PARISH MASS

Full participation in the Mass and the sacraments must be experienced, both by congregations and by their members as individuals. Neither talking nor reading about the laity's part in Catholic worship is enough. The best theoretical preparation or the soundest instruction will not take the place of actual celebration.

That is why the Second Vatican Council, in its Constitution on the Liturgy, lists the parts of Catholic worship which the people should say or sing: "acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and songs . . ." And the participation of the laity is supposed to be the primary aim, again according to the Council, not only in the future "restoration" of the liturgy, but in its "promotion" here and now.

The immediacy of this promotion was stressed by Pope Paul VI on January 25, 1964, in his document on putting the Constitution into effect and to work, and again in an Instruction dated September 26, 1964. But there is an apparent obstacle:

The Council decreed that all the official service books—missal, ritual, etc.—should be revised by experts "from various parts of the world." But neither the Council's requirement that the work be done "as soon as possible" nor Pope Paul's quick announcement of the establishment of a commission for the same purpose disguises the fact that this may be a long and complicated task.

This is the source, in turn, of a temptation to postpone liturgical participation in places where it has not yet been developed, to wait for the finished product of the liturgical reform. Such action or inaction is of course just the opposite of what the bishops decided almost unanimously at the Council.

Speculation about future changes is profitable and necessary, but the Council's immediate concern is "to promote the liturgical instruction of the faithful, and also their active participation in the liturgy, both internally and externally." Here and now the

ways to promote congregational participation are already clear and definite, whatever the future holds:

Responses. These acclamations or responses are mentioned first by the Council as the way in which the people express publicly their part in the Church's life of worship and prayer. At Mass there are only six or eight different phrases of this kind, all simple, all coming at key moments. If for the present some must be said in Latin in the United States, at least they are not difficult for any congregation anywhere.

The important thing about "Et cum spiritu tuo," "Amen," etc., is this: Unless the people say or sing them at every Mass, low Mass and high Mass, Sunday Mass and weekday Mass, it will never be truly evident that "liturgical services pertain to the whole body of the Church . . . manifest it and have effects upon it . . . concern the individual members of the Church, in different ways, according to their differing rank, office, and participation."

Community prayers. Perhaps only a few congregations have been able to recite (or sing) the Gloria, Creed, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei in Latin, but it is easy enough for them to pray these texts together in English. In addition, the people may (and should) say or sing the Lord's Prayer before Communion.

The question presented by the Council's teaching can be expressed in the concrete: Is there any congregation, Sunday or weekday, so inattentive or indifferent to holy Mass that it cannot recite the Our Father with spiritual profit? Is there any parish where the few words of the Sanctus in English are too difficult to learn or to pray?

Readings in English. In recent years the reading of the Epistle and Gospel in English while the priest says the Latin has become common at Sunday Masses. Now, as logic and good sense demand, the practice of employing a lector should be extended to weekday Masses, too. This will help to achieve the Council's proposal to promote a "warm and living love for Scripture," to provide "richer fare for the faithful at the table of God's word." For the same reason the Council recognized the "genuine liturgical function" of lectors or readers (as well as of leaders of congregational participation or "commentators").

Hymns and psalms. In 1947, in 1955, and again just before he died in 1958, Pope Pius XII tried to stir up interest in religious singing by the people. The Constitution on the Liturgy makes the same point, not only for devotional services but for the Mass. Parish experience has translated this into a pattern of hymns or psalms in English at low Mass: at the priest's entrance and while he says the preparatory prayers with the server; briefly, between the Epistle and Gospel; at the Offertory; during Communion; after the blessing.

Such a pattern is not necessarily possible at every Sunday Mass, but a Communion hymn or a recessional hymn is not difficult, as a beginning. The purpose: to restore the sense of community worship, which the Mass is by its nature. Communal celebration, says the Council, is to be preferred.

The pattern of singing, already familiar in many parishes, has another advantage. It simplifies the Mass rite for the people by not involving them in the secondary and rather private prayers of the priest at the beginning of Mass, at the offertory, etc.

The Council's Constitution has other features of renewal for the parish Mass: daily homilies "from the sacred text," obviously very brief ones, to unfold God's word to the congregation; participation in the Mass whereby "the faithful, after the priest's Communion, receive the Lord's body from the same sacrifice . . ."

The fact is that not a single one of these many instances of active, conscious participation by the people is dependent upon future reforms and revisions, or upon the official introduction of the mother tongues into the Catholic liturgy. All have an immediate urgency if the renewal decreed by the Council is to be effective.

III

PUTTING THE CONSTITUTION TO WORK

Pope Paul VI, in bringing into force the Ecumenical Council's Constitution on the Liturgy, made active and understanding congregational participation in worship a primary goal.

Of the Constitution's 130 sections, the first one singled out by the Pope for immediate action and application is Article 19:

“With zeal and patience, pastors of souls must promote the liturgical instruction of the faithful, and also their active participation in the liturgy both internally and externally, taking into account their age and condition, their way of life, and standard of religious culture. By so doing, pastors will be fulfilling one of the chief duties of a faithful dispenser of the mysteries of God; and in this matter they must lead their flock not only in word but also by example.”

These words sum up the Second Vatican Council's rules for “the promotion of liturgical instruction and active participation.” And they were given first place in Pope Paul's document of January 25, 1964, on carrying out the Council's plans. “By the very nature of things” the directions for liturgical education and participation “come into force immediately.”

When the Constitution on the Liturgy was promulgated on December 4, 1963, at the public session which closed the second session of the Council, a date was set for its regulations to become effective and universal law of the Church: February 16, 1964, the first Sunday of Lent. At the same time it was evident that many of the Council's decisions would have to be delayed still longer—chiefly because they depend upon the revision of services, texts, prayers, etc.

Most of parts of the Constitution which must wait further and specific action are evident enough. For example, the bishops decided that during Mass “a more representative portion of the holy Scriptures will be read to the people in the course of a prescribed number of years,” that is, in a kind of cycle.

Obviously, this provision cannot take effect until new lectionaries and altar missals are prepared and published. To clarify any doubts and to make sure that the liturgical renewal goes ahead without delay, Pope Paul's January 25 instruction deals with several matters:

(1) Begging "all Christians and particularly all priests" to study the text of the Constitution, the Holy Father urged bishops and pastors in the strongest terms to teach the people how to take part in the Church's worship, with an understanding of its "strength and inner value."

(2) Next Pope Paul set up a special commission to carry out the Council's decisions—particularly by revising the service books, such as the altar missal and ritual. Plans for this commission are found in the Constitution itself: "The liturgical books," says the Council, "are to be revised as soon as possible; experts are to be employed on the task, and bishops are to be consulted, from various parts of the world."

(3) Finally the Pope settled specific questions and in a few cases anticipated the reform of rites and services: immediate permission to celebrate the sacraments of Confirmation and Matrimony during Mass—with special provision for Scripture readings and the nuptial blessing even at marriages celebrated apart from Mass; permission to suppress parts of the daily office of prayer, in the case of those bound to pray the office, without waiting for the revised texts.

Some specific directions given by the Pope insist on more serious steps to be taken without delay:

—Establishment of diocesan liturgical commissions to promote understanding and active participation in public worship by the people;

—the homily preached at Mass in which "the mysteries of the Faith and the guiding principles of the Christian life are expounded from the sacred text"—recommended by the Council as a part of any and every Mass; required, as of February 16, at every Sunday and holy day Mass when a congregation is present;

—the teaching of the liturgy in seminaries and similar institutions, to be revised according to the Council's legislation.

Because the Second Vatican Council has not yet determined with precision the role of "episcopal conferences" or bodies of bishops in the different countries, the January 25 document of Pope Paul gives temporary rules, made more specific in the Instruction of September 26, 1964: Such bodies, organized on a national basis, must include all bishops of dioceses, and may include coadjutor and auxiliary bishops. The enactment of decrees requires a two-thirds vote by secret ballot.

The importance of this rule lies in the authority conferred by the Council itself upon such bodies of bishops in liturgical matters, for example, in the introduction of the vernacular languages into the liturgy.

It is only natural that most attention should be concentrated upon future reforms, upon the commission set up to revise the rite of Mass and the sacraments, and upon the few changes which become effective without delay. Dramatic changes catch the eye; it is all the harder to propose, as Pope Paul and the other bishops have done, the broad program of study, instruction, education, and formation.

Just as there was no waiting period before the Council's doctrine or teaching about the liturgy became official or effective, so Pope Paul's first point, even before setting up the commission for liturgical reform, is the need for training and congregational participation that is both interior and exteriorly expressed.

If any specific norm is the key to the others, it is the insistence that Articles 15, 16, 17, of the Constitution be put into effect immediately—that seminary programs be revised for the next scholastic year.

The Council has called for a thorough reappraisal of the Seminary teaching of dogmatic theology, Scripture, spiritual theology, and pastoral theology—all to be unified in the exposition of "the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation" which is celebrated in Christian worship. The liturgy, which is faith in action, is to have new emphasis in the seminary program of studies and in the seminary life of prayer.

All this stems from the Council's recognition that "it would be futile to entertain any hopes of realizing" its purposes "unless the pastors themselves, in the first place, become thoroughly imbued

with the spirit and power of the liturgy, and undertake to give instruction about it.”

Irrespective of reforms and changes yet to come, the immediate need is education and participation—beginning with “priests, both secular and religious, who are already working in the Lord’s vineyard” and with candidates for the priesthood in seminaries and other places of study.

Only this can bring to pass the high hopes of the Church, as expressed by the Pope and by all the bishops: “Participation by the Christian people as ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people’ (1 Peter 2:9, cf. 2: 4-5) is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.”

IV

ENGLISH IN THE LITURGY

Some have already summed up the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Liturgy as a major concession of the vernacular languages in place of Latin in the liturgy. This is a complete over-simplification. There are much more important liturgical reforms decreed by the Council.

Nevertheless, the use of the mother tongue in the official liturgy is certainly the most striking of the changes already evident.

To understand the Council's decision in this matter of language, it is necessary to mention the background. First of all, the bishops recognized the actual diversity in the Church. Looked at realistically, Latin is not even remotely a universal language. It is not the language of the Scriptures, nor the language of the Oriental Churches. The vast majority of the world's inhabitants do not even have ancestors who spoke Latin. The bishops of the Council were willing to vote for the most radical language concessions, provided they were made dependent on the approval to be given by the bodies of bishops for the respective countries or regions of the world.

One reason for their unanimity is the long, hard work of all who proposed and publicized the vernacular question over the years. Events have proved them right. They truly sensed the mind of the Church and the needs of the Church.

The vernacular thesis is a simple one. If the words are to be meaningful and prayerful, people must pray in their own language. Taking into account "the pastoral and didactic nature of the liturgy," Pope Paul VI and the other bishops prefaced the vernacular legislation with these words: "When the Church prays or sings or acts, the faith of those taking part is nourished and their minds are raised to God, so that they may offer Him their rational service. . . ."

In the case of the sacraments and sacramentals, as distinct from the Mass itself, the Council was entirely open to change:

the entire text, including the very form of the sacraments, may now be in the people's language. This affects or may affect ordinations, funerals, blessings of every kind, Confirmation and Penance, the very important rites for the sick and the dying, the special services which on occasion precede Mass, such as the Holy Week rites. The Council was similarly generous with regard to the Church's daily prayer or office when this is prayed by religious or the laity, but made only a limited and indirect concession of a vernacular office to the clergy.

All this is of secondary interest compared to the Mass, where the Council decreed: "In Masses which are celebrated with the people, a suitable place may be allotted to their mother tongue. This is to apply in the first place to the readings and 'the common prayer,' but also, as local conditions may warrant, to those parts which pertain to the people."

This decision, which has been publicized but not sufficiently clarified, has two situations in mind:

1. The almost universal desire in the Church for the Scripture readings, particularly the Epistle and the Gospel of Mass, in the vernacular.

2. The widespread, though not universal, need for wider concessions, especially and immediately in the parts of Mass which the people say or sing.

Judgment in both cases is left to the bishops in each country or region. The bishops of the United States immediately agreed to take advantage of the Council's legislation, within the limits of the readings and the parts which "belong" to the people.

That is not all. "Wherever a more extended use of the mother tongue within the Mass appears desirable," it may be introduced, but only with the consent or formal permission of the Holy See. This refers to the extension of the vernacular to the "priest's parts" of Mass, namely, the prayers called the collect, secret, and post-communion, and above all the canon itself. Even before the Council's sessions ended, bishops from some countries were considering petitions of this kind for the Holy See's permission. This has been readily granted to the bishops of Canada, Australia, South Africa, England and Wales, for example.

Aside from such special permission, what parts of Mass may the bodies of bishops themselves allow in the vernacular?

First, the readings or lessons, as is obvious. The change, incidentally, will not do away with the need for readers, especially lay readers, who proclaim the word of God to the people at low Masses in many places. Even though it is our tradition to reserve the Gospel reading to the deacon (according to the pattern of solemn Mass) or to the celebrant (in the absence of a deacon), the Council stresses the hierarchical structure of the liturgy, and the reading of scriptural lessons is distinct from the priestly office in worship.

Second, the prayer of the faithful or "the common prayer" to be reintroduced after the sermon, before the offertory begins. No precise form or text for this prayer is determined by the Constitution on the Liturgy; the Instruction of September 26, 1964, leaves the matter to the bodies of bishops. What is certain is that it should be in the mother tongue and that the people should respond to the petitions "for holy Church, for the civil authorities, for those oppressed by various needs, for all mankind, and for the salvation of the entire world." It could take the elaborate form of the Good Friday prayers: a series of invitations to prayer, periods of silent prayer by the people, and collects; or a brief chant or chants, followed by a series of verses and responses and concluding prayers; or, most likely, a few invocations and responses in litaniform with a concluding prayer said by the priest, responded to by the people.

Next, the "parts which pertain to the people," by which the Council means the parts which the people should say or sing together. Two things need to be noted:

1. Although the priest may say the *Agnus Dei*, for example, with the people, it is truly the people's prayer or hymn. Where the vernacular is allowed for such a part of Mass, the priest too uses the vernacular.

2. The parts of the people, like the parts of the priest or deacon, are determined "by the nature of the rite and the principles of liturgy."

In effect, the people's parts are twofold: the "ordinary" parts, chiefly and traditionally the Kyrie, Gloria, Creed, Sanctus, Agnus Dei, and, according to recent usage, the Our Father before Communion; the "proper" parts, changing with each Mass, at the entrance or Introit, between the Epistle and Gospel, at the Offertory, and at Communion.

Because the revision of the Roman missal (and other liturgical books) will take several years to complete, the bishops of the United States have approved an interim but official translation of these parts of Mass. If the people truly take their proper part, singing and praying together, the Council's reform of worship is thus truly under way.

To some these vernacular concessions may seem meager. They do not go much beyond what is already the rule in some countries. But, to use Pope John's expression, the Council has now opened this particular window and has set no limits to the extension of the people's language in the people's worship.

V

CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST

What will the Mass of the future look like? How soon will all the changes decreed in the Constitution of the Second Vatican Council become a matter of ordinary parish practice?

The answer to the second question is impossible to give. The 2,000 bishops of the Council could not themselves work out the details of a revised, reformed Mass rite and text. Instead Pope Paul VI quickly established a commission to correct the official missal "so that the sacrifice of the Mass, even in the ritual forms of its celebration, may become pastorally efficacious to the fullest degree." The first fruits of this commission's labors were published in the form of an Instruction, September 26, 1964.

The other question is easier. The Council's Constitution on the Liturgy, Chapter II, entitled "The Most Sacred Mystery of the Eucharist," gives the general directions and also the purpose: that the meaning of the Mass "may be more clearly manifested, and that devout and active participation by the faithful may be more easily achieved."

Some changes are obvious enough. Others, like concelebration of Mass and Communion under both kinds, require much explanation.

Even the simpler changes may take time to work out:

—Official use of mother tongues, at least for the scriptural readings and the parts of Mass which are properly said or sung by the people;

—Greater variety and better selection in the Epistles and Gospels;

—Preaching of homilies as an integral part of Mass—already required;

—Restoration of a form of "people's prayer" after the Gospel and homily, to ask God's intercession for the Church, diocese, and parish, for those in need and for all mankind.

More complex was the Council's solemn decision to restore, at least for certain special occasions, Communion under both kinds or species. In effect this means that, once a new ritual is given approval, Catholics will have some opportunity to receive Communion not only under the appearance or form of bread but also under the form of wine.

This is a restoration; it is a recovery of something lost. The Eastern Rites have faithfully maintained the practice in the tradition of the Lord's Supper itself, at least by dipping the Host into the precious Blood before Communion.

In past ages the question concerning Communion under both kinds was: Is it necessary? Is it essential? And the Church's answer was no. Today the question is different: Is it desirable? Is it profitable spiritually? And the Church's answer, given by the Pope and the other bishops, is yes.

At the 16th-century Council of Trent the vote on this matter was close, and the Fathers of the council ultimately left the restoration of the "cup" to the popes. Four hundred years later, the bishops were almost unanimous: "Communion under both kinds may be granted when the bishops think fit, not only to clerics and religious, but also to the laity, in cases to be determined by the Apostolic See. . . ."

The examples given in the liturgy Constitution are only three, intended as instances of other possibilities for the future: "to the newly ordained in the Mass of their sacred ordination, to the newly professed in the Mass of their religious profession, and to the newly baptized in the Mass which follows their Baptism." Communion under both kinds is not some privilege of priests, and thus one example each is given for the clergy (including deacons and subdeacons and even the lesser orders), the religious and the laity. Already the hope among the laity, certainly in countries where the level of religious education is high, is that the practice will be extended to the wedding Mass, to the occasions of first Communion and Confirmation, and the like.

The cases may seem few and rare; this is no widescale return to ancient practice. But it is a beginning and, at the very least, it shows the willingness of the Church to attempt a renewal. It

should overcome, as no apologetic explanation would ever do, the charge that the laity are denied the cup of the Lord's Blood. It shows respect for the usage of the Eastern Churches, both Orthodox and Catholic.

But what, after all, is the purpose of restoring Communion under both kinds? The answer lies in the nature of the Eucharist as food and drink, as a holy meal. The Eucharistic sacrifice or Mass was instituted by Christ in the form of a family meal, a banquet of the community which is the Church. Any experience, any sign, any outward evidence that we eat the Lord's Flesh and drink His Blood makes our participation a holier thing.

In modern times no Catholic has doubted that the Mass is a true sacrifice offered to God; that is beyond question. That it is a sacred meal of food and drink has not penetrated very deeply into Catholic consciousness at times. It is not enough for the Council to decree: "Efforts also must be made to encourage a sense of community within the parish, above all in the common celebration of Sunday Mass." Pastors and priests and teachers must also put this into effect, by restoring the fullness of understanding of the Mass.

Similar reasoning operated in a second major reform of the Council concerning the Mass: the decision to extend concelebration. The decree has two parts. The first part makes concelebration of Mass the regular practice—once the ritual has been prepared and published—on Holy Thursday, at councils and synods, and certain other occasions. The second part allows concelebration, with the permission of the bishop or the major religious superior, at the daily Mass in institutions, in communities, and even in parishes when the needs of the people do not require additional Masses—in fact on any occasion when priests are gathered together without the obligation of celebrating individual Masses.

Again, the doctrine or theory was already clear enough. The Church is best manifested or seen "in the full active participation of all God's holy people . . . especially in the same Eucharist, in a single prayer, at one altar, at which there presides the bishop surrounded by his college of priests and by his ministers."

The problem lies rather in practice, where the unity of the Christian community is lost sight of, especially when many priests celebrate many separate Masses in the same Church at the same time. Concelebration groups the many priests around the bishop (or the priest who takes his place) at the one altar, offering the one Eucharist in union with the whole body of the faithful.

In the large parish, concelebration of Mass on Sundays is hardly an immediate possibility, but the restoration or extension of the practice—now followed only at the Mass of ordination of priests and consecration of bishops—has a pastoral, practical goal. It will be a sign of the unity of the Church, an experience and an expression of the Church as a worshiping community. As the Canon of the Mass puts it, the offering is made by the “servants” of God and by the “holy people” of God, that is, by priests and people together.

Besides this, concelebration, “whereby the unity of the priesthood is appropriately manifested,” will give a fresh turn and depth to the piety and understanding of priests. It shows the meaning of the holy order of priesthood—a college, a body, a community into which men are ordained to be the collaborators and cooperators of the bishop, and the servants or ministers of the people.

Even before issuing its Constitution “On the Church,” the Second Vatican Council proclaimed the nature of the Church as the praying people of God, as an assembly of worshipers. Communion under both kinds, concelebration, and the whole revision of the rite of holy Mass will gradually make this doctrine concrete, a matter of Sunday practice in the parish which is the Church in miniature.

VI

SACRAMENTS OF FAITH

The revolutionary Constitution on public worship enacted by Vatican Council II not only concentrates on reforms affecting the Mass, the principal liturgy, but also provides for renewal of all the sacraments.

Chapter III of the Council's Constitution is called "The Other Sacraments and the Sacramentals." It deals with the sacraments other than the Eucharist (to which Chapter II is devoted) and with the sacramentals or "lesser sacraments." It begins with a fundamental explanation: "The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God."

Already the spirit of theological renewal is evident in the words of the Council. The least instructed Catholic sees in the sacraments sources of God's favor for himself ("to sanctify men")—in fact, there is always great danger of viewing the sacraments exclusively in this way, almost as mechanical and routine sources of infallible grace. The bishops of the Council bring to the fore two other notions: that the sacraments, all the sacraments, have a social, corporate, and public nature ("to build up the body of Christ," which is the Church); that the sacraments require dedication, commitment, faith, and devotion from those who take part in them ("to give worship to God").

The idea of the sacraments as channels of God's grace is not weakened or lessened by the Council's teaching. But it is important to insist also on the venerable phrase, "sacraments of faith," and to show how the sacraments instruct. The sacraments (and the sacramentals and indeed all liturgical rites and deeds) are signs which "the faithful should easily understand." Anyone familiar with the complex service of Baptism will readily see how much revision and simplification is needed. In this and other cases, what should be the most clearly expressed words (the "form" of the sacrament), with the greatest significance and meaning to the people, have been said up until now in a language not understood by the participants.

Thus the Pope and the other Fathers of the Council decreed a reform and a revision, beginning with the introduction of the mother tongues—the latter to the extent decided upon by the bodies of bishops in each country or region. The purpose of the reform is simply expressed: “With the passage of time there have crept into the rites of the sacraments and sacramentals certain features which have rendered their nature and purpose far from clear to the people of today; hence some changes have become necessary to adapt them to the needs of our own times.”

The first matter taken up by the Council, after the use of the vernacular languages, is the preparation of local or regional rituals for the celebration of sacraments and sacramentals. The principle at stake is an important one: to correct the error that the Church’s unity requires uniformity of practice, or, stated positively, to show the special excellence in diversity. Prayers and rites are thus intended by the bishops to reflect the genius, customs, or religious traditions of different nations and peoples.

In Chapter III of the Constitution on the Liturgy there are eight articles or paragraphs on Christian initiation. They begin with the plan to revive the catechumenate, the period of formation and preparation before the Baptism of an adult. Nowadays this period is often considered merely as a time of instruction, for acquiring information. The Council wishes it to recover the character of a period of spiritual formation, conversion of soul, prayer by the whole community for the candidate.

All the rites related to Baptism, the first of the sacraments, are to be re-examined: for infants, for adults, for the reception of converts, for the first welcome of a child into the parish church after he has been received into the Church by Baptism administered in an emergency, etc. More important than these revisions is the attempt to unite the three sacraments of Christian initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist.

Confirmation is rarely thought of as completing Baptism and leading to the celebration of the Eucharist. The bishops now propose that this meaning should be brought out by the renewal of baptismal promises just before the rite of Confirmation and by celebrating Confirmation itself, where possible, during Mass.

In the United States most of the candidates for Confirmation have already received Communion for the first time, perhaps several years earlier. Nevertheless even in these circumstances it is still desirable that the newly confirmed should take part in Mass immediately and receive Communion. At least on that single occasion the fullness of Christian initiation would be evident: Baptism completed by Confirmation, Confirmation leading to the eucharistic celebration.

All sacraments (and sacramentals, for that matter) are dependent on the Eucharist and flow from it. The instinct of the Church has always been to show this relation—that is the reason why the sacrament of Holy Orders is conferred during Mass. Now the Council wishes to allow for and encourage the celebration of Baptism, Confirmation, Matrimony, religious profession, etc., as a part of Mass.

In the case of the marriage service, which is brief and simple in itself, the Council's directive is clear: It is to take place during Mass after the reading of the Epistle and Gospel and the preaching of the sermon or homily; it is to be followed by appropriate prayers of the people and by the remainder of Mass, in which the bride and groom take part.

Still on the subject of the marriage rite, the Constitution directs that, even when marriage is celebrated apart from Mass, the Epistle and Gospel of the nuptial Mass should be read beforehand and the nuptial blessing given. This blessing will be later revised to include mention of the groom as well as the bride, so that the equal fidelity to which both spouses pledge themselves will be expressed and taught.

Some changes in the sacraments require a future correction of ritual texts. This is not the case, however, with the Council's strong teaching on the sacrament of Anointing. In theory, the faithful are already instructed to summon the priest at the beginning of a serious illness and not to delay. But many things have conspired against a proper understanding of the sacrament of healing: the expression "last rites," the official name "Extreme Unction," the practice (of many centuries) of administering anointing after Viaticum. Even priests sometimes demand proof of the

seriousness of the illness or of the imminence of death before feeling free to administer this sacrament.

The Council has tried to change all this: (1) by the better name for the sacrament: "the Anointing of the Sick"; (2) by making clear that the Eucharist itself, Communion as Viaticum, is the "last" sacrament; (3) and by explaining: Anointing "is not a sacrament for those only who are at the point of death. Hence, as soon as any one of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the fitting time for him to receive this sacrament has certainly already arrived."

Finally, the revision of the sacramentals, blessings, processions, etc., should be mentioned. This must, in the words of the Council, "take into account the primary principle of enabling the faithful to participate intelligently, actively, and easily; the circumstances of our own time must also be considered."

Of special interest is the decision of the Council to provide sacramentals which may be administered by lay people, for example, the blessing of children or of the home by a father or mother; blessings to be given by catechists in the absence of a priest; specific blessings which may be prepared for lay religious superiors or for those in charge of schools.

The changes in the sacramental rites which the Council has decreed are important. The Council's teaching of doctrine is more important: The liturgy of sacraments and sacramentals gives the faithful access to the power of Christ's Easter passage from death to life, "access to the stream to divine grace which flows from the paschal mystery of the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ."

VII

THE CHURCH AT PRAYER

The Constitution on the Liturgy, which is the first fruit of Vatican Council II, is pastoral rather than clerical in tone.

Its direct concern is with the needs of the flock, the lay members of the Church. It is less concerned with the clergy, the shepherds or pastors who serve the people.

In the entire reform of worship and promotion of liturgical understanding, "the aim to be considered before all else" is the "full and active participation by all the people."

Superficially, Chapter IV of the Council's document on worship may appear to be an exception. It deals with the Divine Office, the public prayer of Christ and His Church. In practice and popular estimation, this official prayer is exclusively the occupation (and obligation) of priests and many religious.

In point of fact, the Council took a much broader stand and initiated a reform of the office so that it "may be better and more perfectly prayed in existing circumstances, whether by priests or by other members of the Church."

Naturally the bishops assembled in Rome were immediately anxious that priests and religious, the ones who actually pray the daily office, should pray it worthily and with the greatest spiritual profit to the Church. Their broader hope was that the laity should "recite the Divine Office, either with the priests, or among themselves, or even individually."

Such encouragement from the Council would be completely unrealistic if a thorough revision of the Church's daily prayer were not decreed at the same time. The present-day office is a marvelous compilation of readings, especially from the Bible, and of psalms, hymns, and prayers—but its form and arrangement are complicated, repetitious, and formalistic. It is almost never celebrated with popular, congregational participation; few lay people find it an attractive form of daily prayer, in spite of its excellence of content.

The forthcoming revision of the Divine Office, which the bishops decided upon, will be twofold: (1) a better selection of texts (content), and (2) a better arrangement of parts (structure).

In Chapter II the Council decreed a fresh, more suitable, and more varied selection of readings from the Bible for the Epistle and Gospel of Mass. The same principle will also be applied to the office, both in the Bible readings and in the passages taken from the Fathers of the Church and other writers. Historical inaccuracies will be corrected in the accounts of the lives of the saints; the quality of hymns will be improved.

The structure of the office, according to the Council, "is devised so that the whole course of the day and night is made holy by the praises of God." At present this design fails to work out in practice. Even in monasteries the parts or "hours" of the office have to be combined and celebrated at inappropriate times of the day. The clergy engaged in the pastoral ministry find it almost impossible to observe the pattern of the hours, planned for the different periods of the day.

When the office is reformed in structure, it will clearly have three principal parts: (1) morning prayer, called Lauds, (2) evening prayer, called Vespers, and (3) an "hour of reading" (Matins). The latter will not be attached to any particular period of the day, but will form a real service of spiritual reading for all who take part in the office, whether in communities or alone.

With this clear and simpler pattern, the lesser parts of the Church's daily prayer will fit into their secondary place: brief prayers for mid-morning, noon, and mid-afternoon—but only one of these three to be obligatory for the clergy—and the prayer of Compline before retiring at night. The hour of Prime, a monastic prayer that is a duplication of the morning prayer (Lauds), will be suppressed.

While the process of simplifying the office will involve some abbreviation as well, a lessening of prayer within the Church was hardly the Council's purpose. On the contrary, for those who must or those who choose to pray the daily office, the problem today is not the total period of time at prayer, but the need to get

through so many psalm verses and vocal prayers: not too much prayer, but too many prayers to be said.

If the office is revised well, it will be easier to pray with greater deliberation, more slowly, in fact more prayerfully. Adaptations of the office in the form of "short breviaries," just as much the Church's prayer as the full Divine Office, will be worked out—especially for communities of Sisters and of Brothers, but well suited to lay men and women.

Still better, a single form of community prayer—for example, a new version of Sunday Vespers—might be celebrated together by the faithful, by the sisters or brothers of the parish school, and by the pastor and other priests.

In this chapter of the Constitution on worship, much is made of the bishop's authority, in the general spirit of decentralization that characterizes the Council. The bishop may now dispense those otherwise obliged to pray the office. He may allow the clergy, on an individual basis, to recite the office in their own language instead of Latin. But here again there is an immediate mention of the laity and their needs: any priest, without dispensation or permission, may celebrate the office in the vernacular language with a group of the faithful.

Among the strong exhortations addressed to the Church in the Council's Constitution on worship is the plea that "priests and all others who take part in the Divine Office" should "improve their understanding of the liturgy and of the Bible, especially of the psalms." While it refers directly to the Divine Office described above and now about to be reformed, this recommendation is applicable also to another kind of "public prayer" of the Church, less official and less formal.

This is the so-called Bible service or Bible devotion, mentioned in Chapter I of the Constitution. Such services, which the Council calls "sacred celebrations of the word of God," are clearly related to the office itself—in spirit, because they are scriptural in their composition, including Bible readings, psalmody, etc.; in their form, because they follow the pattern and style of liturgical prayer and action.

These services are recommended by the Council as evening devotions, for example, on Sundays and on the weekdays of Advent and Lent. Since they do not have any set or official form, they may be introduced into popular devotional usage immediately—and already are in use in many places.

Bible services, although not part of the office, deepen scriptural understanding and give a liturgical spirit to popular devotions. They suggest one way of taking a long, hard look at existing devotions; this is now made necessary by the Council which requires that “these devotions should be so drawn up that they harmonize with the liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some fashion derived from it, and lead the people to it, since, in fact, the liturgy by its very nature far surpasses any of them.”

The bishops of Vatican Council II, who enacted the Constitution by a vote of 2,147 to 4, were determined “to impart an ever increasing vigor to the Christian life of the faithful”—whether it is a question of the Divine Office or of popular devotions.

In the office, says the Constitution, Christ “continues His priestly work through the agency of His Church, which is ceaselessly engaged in praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the whole world.”

VIII

THE EASTER MYSTERY

EVERY SUNDAY

How can the feasts and seasons of the "liturgical year" have meaning in 20th-century daily life? This is the problem taken on by the bishops of the Second Vatican Council in a special chapter in their Constitution on the Liturgy.

The conciliar Fathers were aware, in dealing with this subject, that Advent and Lent, Christmas and Easter, and half a dozen other holydays, are probably the only observances in the Church calendar that have any impact on most Catholics.

As in other parts of the Constitution, here too the Council has decreed a reform which must be worked out in detail gradually. It is intended to suit "the traditional customs and discipline of the sacred seasons" to "the conditions of modern times." One paragraph, for example, contains a decision to revive the twofold character of the Lenten season, first as a time to recall the sacrament of Baptism, next as a time of penance, "not only internal and individual, but also external and social."

There is a long background to the Council's decree to reform the practices and celebrations which recur in each Church year. Pope St. Pius X began to disentangle the observance of Sunday as the Lord's day and of the Lenten season from the overgrowth of the feast days of saints. Pope Pius XII concentrated his spiritual renewal of the Church on Easter, with a rearrangement and shortening of the Holy Week services. Pope John XXIII simplified the complex series of feasts a little and tried to give some relief to the weekday Mass-goer from the constant repetition of the requiem Mass formula which prevails in some places.

This Council, however, speaks of changes "both in the liturgy and by liturgical catechesis." The first reference is to the revisions needed if the progress of the Church's year is to be effective and meaningful for the people. The second reference, "liturgical catechesis," refers to the way in which the meaning of the feasts and seasons is understood and taught, the way in which all the people

of the Church, old and young alike, are instructed, formed, and developed during the liturgy itself, especially during the Mass.

A lesson learned early in the meetings of the Second Vatican Council is that the truths, articles, and dogmas of faith may not be studied or preached as a disjointed series of isolated facts. Their unity in the single mystery of God's plan for men must always be foremost.

The same is true of the Church year with its apparent conglomeration of feasts of varying importance—it needs greater unity and greater concentration, at least in our understanding of it. The Constitution on the Liturgy expresses the central point of the Church year with absolute assurance; it is the paschal or Easter mystery of “the Passion, the Resurrection, and the glorification of the Lord Jesus.”

It is worth noting how often the same unifying theme appears throughout the Council's teaching on sacred worship. The Eucharist is “a memorial of His Death and Resurrection . . . a paschal banquet.” “The paschal mystery of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ” is “the fount from which all sacraments and sacramentals draw their power.”

“The work of Christ the Lord in redeeming mankind and giving perfect glory to God” was “achieved principally by the paschal mystery of His blessed Passion, Resurrection from the dead, and glorious Ascension, whereby ‘dying, He destroyed our death and, rising, He restored our life’.”

If this is the central point in Christian worship, how does it fit into the so-called liturgical year? The superficial answer is the annual observance of Easter, with its special celebration of the Lord's passage from death to life. The Council's answer is different: Sunday is the day of the Lord, the “original feast day,” around which all else circles.

“Every week, on the day which the Church has called the Lord's day, she keeps the memory of the Lord's Resurrection . . . By a tradition handed down from the Apostles which took its origin from the very day of Christ's Resurrection, the Church celebrates the paschal mystery every eighth day. . . . It should be proposed to the piety of the faithful and taught to them so that it may become in fact a day of joy and of freedom from work. . . .”

It is no easy task to recover this full meaning of Sunday—in practice, in the teaching of the clergy, in the awareness of the people—but the Council judges it an important and necessary effort.

The Council, after establishing every Sunday as a day to celebrate the Resurrection, which is central to Christ's "saving work," was able to turn to the annual feast of Easter and the entire series of observances which revolve around it.

These are described as the Church's attempt to unfold "the whole mystery of Christ, from the Incarnation and Birth until the Ascension, the day of Pentecost, and the expectation of blessed hope and of the coming of the Lord." In the course of each year, the powers and merits of Christ's deeds are "made present for all time"; Christians are able to lay hold upon them.

In all this, the real need is to keep proportion and unity uppermost, to center every facet of the Christian religion around the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. With this in mind, the bishops of the Council approached the delicate question of the feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the other saints.

These have their necessary, significant place in the Church's year (and in the consciousness of the faithful)—certainly in the case of Mary, as well as in the case of "saints who are truly of universal importance" throughout the Church. The Constitution on the Liturgy decrees that the saints' feasts must not predominate or take precedence. Again, it is a question of maintaining unity and proportion in the way in which the Christian Faith is proclaimed and celebrated.

Now it should be clear why, in another connection, the Council insists upon a return to scriptural emphasis in worship and in teaching. "It is essential to promote that warm and living love for Scripture to which the tradition of both eastern and western rites gives testimony."

In the liturgy of the future—with the major revision of the liturgical books—"there is to be more reading from holy Scripture, and it is to be more varied and suitable."

In the liturgy of the present, preaching “should draw its content mainly from scriptural and liturgical sources.” Bible services—in today’s practice, not merely in the future—should be encouraged, particularly to unfold the many but unified sides of the mystery of Christ celebrated each year.

One last point should be made. Some have thought that the Council’s liturgical renewal is a matter of revising legal regulations for Catholic worship. This is the same kind of error that Pope Pius XII rebuked as long ago as 1947.

On the contrary the Council’s purpose is far deeper. It intends to renew the Christian spirit and to center observances, practice, and understanding upon the mystery of Christ, in particular upon the paschal mystery announced in Scripture, the Lord’s dying, rising from the dead, and ascending into glory.

IX

ART FOR WORSHIP'S SAKE

It is probably two decades since any informed American Catholic has fallen into the error that the liturgical movement is merely a matter of large-sized vestments, modern art, and Gregorian chant techniques. This total misconception of the liturgical movement, once prevalent among the clergy, finds no support at all in the Constitution on the Liturgy enacted by Pope Paul VI and the other bishops of the Ecumenical Council.

In fact the notion of a revival concerned with externals of worship finds no justification in such organs of the movement in the United States as the monthly magazine *Worship*, published since 1926, and the annual Liturgical Weeks, held since 1940.

The goals of all such efforts are identical with the liturgical purposes of Vatican Council II: "to ensure that the faithful take part, fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects."

Nevertheless, the spiritual renewal intended by the Council is to affect human beings, men rather than angels, men assembled by God as a community of worshipers. Therefore, the Council devoted two substantial chapters of its Constitution to the arts of the Church, to architecture, the graphic and plastic arts, and above all church music. These are treated as a kind of sign language, which expresses outwardly and in different ways the same faith and devotion which the words and actions of public worship manifest.

The key to this notion is found in a single sentence of the Constitution: "In the liturgy the sanctification of man is signified by signs perceptible to the senses . . ."

And so the Council laid down a general principle for art in the building, renovating, adorning, and furnishing of places of worship: "The Church has not adopted any particular style of art as her very own . . . The art of our own days, coming from every race and region, shall also be given free scope in the Church . . ."

During the debate on this question at the Council's 1962 session, some bishops felt that the whole treatment of sacred art

could be stated in a few sentences such as these, to encourage rather than inhibit the artist of today.

The important point in Chapter VII of the Constitution is freedom for sacred art—limited only by the truths of faith and the concrete needs of worship. In recent centuries, certainly in recent decades, the Church has seemed to be a poor patron of fresh, bold, contemporary art. Of course religious art of past times must not be destroyed or renounced, but the present need is to welcome the “art of our own days” into the service of religion, “to contribute its own voice of praise” in Christian worship.

Most artists and architects will welcome the new norms laid down, in broad terms, by the Council:

—To strive for “beauty rather than mere sumptuous display” in art, vestments, and ornaments—a blow for simplicity in place of costly and gaudy showiness;

—To cut down the excessive multiplication of images in churches, which leads to “confusion among the Christian people”;

—To build churches that are “suitable for the celebration of liturgical services and for the active participation of the faithful.”

This last rule, perhaps the most practical in Chapter VII of the document, is something new in Church legislation. It corresponds to the efforts of the best architects in recent years, who see a church building as a sacred room where the people of God assemble, with the priest at their head, to celebrate the Holy Eucharist.

Why does the Constitution make no reference to specific matters like altars erected so that the priest faces the people during Mass? One reason is obvious. Mass facing the people is not a question of future reforms; it is an accepted, lawful, and desirable practice already—like the singing of hymns or psalms at suitable times during low Mass, the use of lay readers and commentators, the token offertory processions already common in some places.

Before the bishops voted to revise the regulations for church buildings, they received a printed explanation to illustrate some of the specific revisions proposed. In this document—a kind of

appendix for the bishops' information—the ideal church plan is described.

The celebrant's seat is at the rear-center of the sanctuary area (at the "head" of the church); the altar is located between the sanctuary and the nave (that is, between the clergy and the people, in the midst of the assembly). The presence of a small tabernacle on the altar should not be considered an obstacle to the celebration of Mass facing the people, a point repeated in the Instruction of September 26, 1964, on implementing the Constitution.

The preceding chapter of the Constitution, Chapter VI, deals with sacred music, "song united to the words . . . a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy." Several points are new and important in Church legislation; they all tend toward a broadening and popularizing of the sung forms of worship:

1. The nobler form of public worship is no longer defined merely as the sung liturgy or the high Mass, but as "divine offices . . . celebrated solemnly in song, with the assistance of sacred ministers and the active participation of the people."

2. Gregorian chant is accorded pride of place in the Roman rite; it is not used in the many other rites of the Church. More important, the Council gives the strongest encouragement thus far to other kinds of music: "The Church approves of all forms of true art having the needed qualities . . ."

This principle, valid everywhere, has a special application among "peoples who have their own musical traditions," which should be introduced into the liturgy. One test is proposed: harmony with the "spirit of the liturgical action," specifically by allowing the people to sing "acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and songs . . ."

3. Depending on the decision of the bodies of bishops in the different countries or regions, the Council allows the vernacular languages in the sung Mass (and other services) to the same extent as in the low Mass.

This opens up to composers and choirs perhaps the greatest opportunity for the development of church music in a thousand years—but with a new and strong proviso: composers are invited

to produce “genuine sacred music, not confining themselves to works which can be sung only by large choirs, but providing also for the needs of small choirs and for the active participation of the entire assembly of the faithful.”

All this means, or can mean, revolutionary growth and providential freedom in the arts of the Church, especially music and architecture. But the Council’s concern with them is directed toward the faith and holiness of the worshipers. In the Christian liturgy the arts are the sign language of prayer and praise of God.

From gloomy silence to joyous song—this is the revolution demanded by the Second Vatican Council for Catholic worship.

X

GUIDELINES FOR PRESENT AND FUTURE

It may be expressed in other ways—from passive unconcern at Mass to active involvement, from a liturgy understood by priests to the people's worship.

The Constitution on the Liturgy is revolutionary, partly because it decrees a thorough reform of the services of worship, partly because it brings the whole Church abreast of the Biblical, catechetical, ecumenical and theological movements of the past few decades. To take one example, the picture of the Church as a legalistic, authoritarian society is bypassed. The Church is seen as a community of love, as an assembly of worshipers.

The center of Christian worship is the celebration of the Eucharist, holy Mass. According to the Council, this is the height toward which all the other activities of the Church lead. It is the source and starting point for the entire Christian life of the faithful.

Yet, more often than not, the Mass appears to be an impersonal and mechanical rite, the weekly payment of a debt to God, or a haven of escape from the real world. For a long time people have been described as "hearing Mass" and priests have been described as "saying Mass," as if it were a formula of words—words spoken in a language which not one participant in a thousand could understand without a translation. The involvement of the individual person in the community's worship is at a minimum. Communion hardly appears to be the joyful feast of the Christian family at the Lord's common table.

"The Church," says the Council, "has never failed to come together to celebrate the Paschal Mystery" of the Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus, "reading those things 'which were in the Scriptures concerning him' (Luke 24:27), celebrating the Eucharist in which 'the victory and triumph of his death are again made present,' and at the same time giving thanks 'to God for his unspeakable gift' (2 Cor. 9:15) in Christ Jesus, 'in praise of his glory' (Eph. 1:12), through the power of the Holy Spirit."

This description of holy Mass is far removed from the routine and hurried celebration that is still common—and in which the mystery of God’s great deeds in His people is not revealed but made mysterious. The description also shows how the Council preferred the authentic language of the Bible to the technical catechism formulas and the abstract terms of theology.

In the concrete, the Pope and the other bishops of the Council decided that the whole Mass should be simplified: “Elements which, with the passage of time, came to be duplicated, or were added with but little advantage, are now to be discarded; other elements which have suffered injury through accidents of history are now to be restored to the vigor which they had in the days of the holy Fathers, as may seem useful or necessary.”

This reform of the Mass prayers and rites, underway with the appointment of the new commission by Pope Paul VI, may involve cutting down the offertory prayers, restoring the Eucharistic prayer or Canon to its former effectiveness, solemnly proclaimed aloud, and improving the announcement of God’s word. None of this is change for the sake of novelty, but for the sake of meaningful, genuine worship.

The directives adopted by the Council for this work of reform indicate facets of Catholic worship that have been neglected and now need to be re-established, if in fact as well as in theory the liturgy is to be “considered as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ” by all His members.

First, the communal and hierarchic nature of the Christian liturgy is to be stressed. The Church is the sacrament or sign of unity. It is defined as “the holy people united and ordered under their bishops.” This must become evident, much more evident, in the ways of worship: the priest presides and leads, but the people have their full part.

Next, the very act of worship is a lesson and a teacher. The Constitution on the Liturgy expresses this by setting down rules for future reform “based upon the didactic and pastoral nature of the liturgy . . . For in the liturgy God speaks to His people and Christ is still proclaiming His Gospel. And the people reply to God both by song and by prayer.”

This is why the rites of worship should be “short, clear, and unencumbered by useless repetitions . . . within the people’s powers of comprehension.” This is why the Council calls for a radical change in preaching, drawn “mainly from Scriptural and liturgical sources,” why the language of the people will be introduced after many centuries of divorce between nave and sanctuary.

Finally, the bishops adopted a principle of adaptation, so that there may be flexibility and diversity in the liturgy from place to place. Only God and His teaching are unchanging. Human institutions and human prayers must change and be adapted to men’s understanding. A fundamental purpose of the Second Vatican Council is “to adapt more suitably to the needs of our own times those institutions which are subject to change.”

The Church is always young, always alive. Its renewal and reform affect people in different ways. For some, change seems to be a harsh renunciation of the past, even though the Council has explained the Christian Faith and its purposes in the very words of holy Scripture.

For others, including the college of apostles, the Council’s first achievement is “a sign of the providential dispositions of God in our time, as a movement of the Holy Spirit in His Church . . . a distinguishing mark of the Church’s life, indeed of the whole tenor of contemporary religious thought and action.”

Above all, the Constitution on the Liturgy fulfills the vision of Pope John XXIII, that renewal of the Church might be the first step toward the unity of all who believe in Christ. As a divine institution, the Church is without spot or blemish. As a human institution, made up of sinful men, the Church may be unattractive and incomprehensible—in fact the vast, vast majority of men are unaware of, or are indifferent to, the Church.

The Church is not afraid of the present or of the future. It welcomes growth and progress. The people celebrate the memorial of the Lord’s death and triumph, Passion and Resurrection—and in that celebration they commit themselves to live as Christians and to bear witness to Christ.

The council of renewal does not hesitate to express the Christian hope with gladness: “We eagerly await the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, until He, our life, shall appear and we too will appear with Him in glory.”

XI

LITURGICAL REFORMS— FIRST STEP

The first few changes in the Mass, to make popular understanding and participation easier, have now been published. This preliminary step in the overall liturgical reform decreed in 1963 by Vatican Council II will go into effect throughout the Church on March 7, 1965, the First Sunday of Lent.

In its Constitution on the Liturgy, the Council gave broad mandates for reforms to be worked out in detail by a commission drawn from all over the world. Early in 1964 Pope Paul VI set up the commission, with the major task of revising the official missal, ritual, breviary, etc. Although the complete reform is expected to take several years, the "Commission for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy" prepared an interim Instruction concerning the Mass and other services. It was made public October 16 by the Congregation of Rites, the agency of the Roman Curia which has dealt with liturgical matters since the 16th century.

Unlike the changes of liturgical texts into the various liturgical languages, which are questions entrusted by the Council to the bishops of each country, the new Instruction is obligatory throughout the Latin rites of the Church, by express direction of Pope Paul. Most striking among the changes are those in the Mass, all flowing from the Council's decision to help the people take their own part by stressing the community nature of Christian worship and by taking full advantage of the liturgy's educative or formative possibilities.

The beginning and end of Mass have been simplified: psalm 42 in the preparatory prayers said by the priest and server is dropped; Mass ends at the blessing, with the last gospel and the prayers after Mass entirely eliminated.

These omissions do not shorten the Mass very much, nor is this the intention of the change. In fact the time saved is needed for the preaching insisted upon by the Council as an integral part

of the Mass, and also for the new "prayer of the people." The latter, a brief series of invocations or petitions, is to be said or sung at the completion of the service of God's word (readings, homily, creed), just after the priest says "Let us pray." The actual text of the prayer of the faithful, however, has been left to the decision of the national conferences of bishops.

One contradiction in the rite of Mass has been partially corrected. Three of the most solemn and public prayers, recited quietly by the priest up to the present time, are now to be sung or said aloud for all to hear and to respond: (a) the prayer over the offerings, called the secret prayer, which completes the preparation of the bread and wine; (b) the concluding doxology of the Canon or eucharistic prayer; and (c) the prayer for deliverance from evil and for peace, which is added to the Lord's Prayer. Of the "public" prayers of Mass, which the whole congregation should hear and follow, only the body of the Canon, which still awaits revision, will be said quietly.

Broader changes are also indicated. On principle, the celebrating priest is no longer to recite privately or quietly any text or prayer or reading that is said or sung by others, whether by the people or the choir in the case of chants and hymns, or by a lector in the case of readings. This eliminates a curious duplication; in the past the rule prevailed that the priest should recite the Gloria, for example, even though the hymn was sung by the people. This change, making specific a decision of the Council, is not intended to relieve the priest of a small burden. It is to make a clear distinction of the roles or parts in the liturgy, with each one, priest or minister or layman, taking his own part.

In countries where parts of the Mass are said in the vernacular, the epistle and gospel should of course be proclaimed or announced facing the people, to whom the words are addressed. The new Instruction goes further, however, and describes a whole new rite for this "liturgy of the word of God."

At low Mass, for example, it is preferable that a lector, whether a cleric or a layman, should read the epistle, while the celebrant listens; the same lector may read the chants which follow the epistle, unless these are sung or recited by others. The gospel reading

is reserved to a deacon, a second priest, or the celebrant himself. Even at low Mass, the celebrant may remain at his seat through these readings, thus emphasizing his office of presiding over the service and taking his place at the altar only for the celebration of the Eucharist itself, beginning at the offertory.

Various possibilities are provided for the readings: at the lectern or pulpit, at the edge of the sanctuary area or railing, even at the altar. The alternatives are a step toward breaking down the rigidity and formalism of ceremonial directives or rubrics. Great flexibility is provided, according to circumstances, so that the reading to the people will be well planned beforehand, and not conducted routinely according to a rigid pattern.

To help popular participation and to show that the Mass is a sacrificial banquet or meal, the Instruction allows and prefers, but does not require, that altars be arranged for Mass with the celebrant facing the people. It is made very clear that Mass may be celebrated in this way even if there is a small tabernacle on the altar.

A few directions are given on church building and planning, to encourage congregations to participate with understanding. The widest freedom is given in locating the tabernacle, which has sometimes appeared to be an obstacle to the celebration of Mass toward the people. The tabernacle may be on the main altar or on another altar (ideally in a separate chapel or area, according to the Instruction) or even, according to local custom and in particular cases with the approval of the bishop, in some other fitting place in the church.

The Instruction, which contains 99 sections, deals with many details, some technical, such as the procedure when the national bodies of bishops enact legislation on the liturgy in virtue of the 1963 Constitution. The responsibilities of liturgical commissions, national and diocesan, are also spelled out at length.

Most details have pastoral value and importance: the possibility of sung Mass with a deacon but without a subdeacon; the elimination of restrictions formerly placed upon priests in giving certain blessings; the reprobation of any distinction among persons, for example, in church seating arrangements, on the basis of social or economic condition. One welcome concession allows the faith-

ful who receive holy Communion at the Easter Vigil Mass or at the Christmas midnight Mass to receive Communion again at Mass on Easter Sunday morning and on Christmas day.

The Instruction devotes much space to seminary training and especially to long overdue integration of the whole spiritual life of clerical students with the liturgy. The popular Bible services are encouraged in parishes, but with their pattern left flexible. Details of the confirmation and marriage rites within Mass itself are worked out. Since the homily is a part of the Mass, and not a catechetical instruction or occasional sermon, a general statement of the Council is made specific: where plans for Mass sermons are set up, they must be in harmony with the seasons and feasts of the church year, that is, with the mystery of redemption.

In some matters the Instruction is more restrictive than the Council's Constitution on the Liturgy. Altar missals and breviaries used by the clergy should contain Latin as well as vernacular texts, even when the latter are allowed. The ordination rites must remain in Latin, except for introductory sections. In general, however, the openness of the Council has been preserved, even in a document which necessarily deals in directives and norms.

The spirit of liturgical renewal shines through in the significant opening paragraphs of the Instruction. The whole import of the reform does not lie in novelty, but in pastoral action to express the "paschal mystery" better. This mystery of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus is celebrated in the Church "in the sacraments of faith, chiefly baptism and the Eucharist." And around the celebration of the Eucharist "are ranged the other sacraments and the sacramentals, by which the paschal mystery of Christ is unfolded in the course of each church year."

Some will be disappointed that this or that change has not been achieved at once, but the Instruction points out repeatedly its provisional character and the necessity of a gradual, step by step liturgical reform. But there is no gradualness mentioned in the case of liturgical education and instruction, formation and participation. This task, according to the Instruction, is the responsibility of all pastors of souls, "one of the chief duties of a faithful dispenser of the mysteries of God," in the words of Vatican Council II.

