

Instruction on Certain Matters to be Observed or to be Avoided Regarding the Most Holy Eucharist

Chapter II:

The Participation of the Lay Christian Faithful in the Eucharistic Celebration

1. Active and Conscious Participation

[36.] The celebration of the Mass, as the action of Christ and of the Church, is the center of the whole Christian life for the universal as well as the particular Church, and also for the individual faithful,[87] who are involved “in differing ways according to the diversity of orders, ministries, and active participation.[88] In this way the Christian people, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy people, a people God has made his own”,[89] manifests its coherent and hierarchical ordering”.[90] “For the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical Priesthood, though they differ in essence and not only in degree, are ordered to one another, for both partake, each in its own way, of the one Priesthood of Christ”.[91]

[37.] All of Christ’s faithful, freed from their sins and incorporated into the Church through Baptism, are deputed by means of a sacramental character for the worship of the Christian religion,[92] so that by virtue of their royal priesthood,[93] persevering in prayer and praising God,[94] they may offer themselves as a living and holy sacrifice pleasing to God and attested to others by their works,[95] giving witness to Christ throughout the earth and providing an answer to those who ask concerning their hope of eternal life that is in them.[96] Thus the participation of the lay faithful too in the Eucharist and in the other celebrations of the Church’s rites cannot be equated with mere presence, and still less with a passive one, but is rather to be regarded as a true exercise of faith and of the baptismal dignity.

[38.] The constant teaching of the Church on the nature of the Eucharist not only as a meal, but also and pre-eminently as a Sacrifice, is therefore rightly understood to be one of the principal keys to the full participation of all the faithful in so great a Sacrament.[97] For when “stripped of its sacrificial meaning, the mystery is understood as if its meaning and importance were simply that of a fraternal banquet”.[98]

[39.] For promoting and elucidating active participation, the recent renewal of the liturgical books according to the mind of the Council fostered acclamations of the people, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and canticles, as well as actions or movements and gestures, and called for sacred silence to be maintained at the proper times, while providing rubrics for the parts of the faithful as well.[99] In addition, ample flexibility is given for appropriate creativity aimed at allowing each celebration to be adapted to the needs of the participants, to their comprehension, their interior preparation and their gifts, according to the established liturgical norms. In the songs, the melodies, the choice of prayers and readings, the giving of the homily, the preparation of the prayer of the faithful, the occasional explanatory remarks, and the decoration of the Church building according to the various seasons, there is ample possibility for introducing into each celebration a certain variety by which the riches of the liturgical tradition will also be more clearly evident, and so, in keeping with pastoral requirements, the celebration will be carefully imbued

with those particular features that will foster the recollection of the participants. Still, it should be remembered that the power of the liturgical celebrations does not consist in frequently altering the rites, but in probing more deeply the word of God and the mystery being celebrated.[100]

[40.] Nevertheless, from the fact that the liturgical celebration obviously entails activity, it does not follow that everyone must necessarily have something concrete to do beyond the actions and gestures, as if a certain specific liturgical ministry must necessarily be given to the individuals to be carried out by them. Instead, catechetical instruction should strive diligently to correct those widespread superficial notions and practices often seen in recent years in this regard, and ever to instill anew in all of Christ's faithful that sense of deep wonder before the greatness of the mystery of faith that is the Eucharist, in whose celebration the Church is forever passing from what is obsolete into newness of life: "*in novitatem a vetustate*".[101] For in the celebration of the Eucharist, as in the whole Christian life which draws its power from it and leads toward it, the Church, after the manner of Saint Thomas the Apostle, prostrates herself in adoration before the Lord who was crucified, suffered and died, was buried and arose, and perpetually exclaims to him who is clothed in the fullness of his divine splendor: "My Lord and my God!"[102]

[41.] For encouraging, promoting and nourishing this interior understanding of liturgical participation, the continuous and widespread celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, the use of the sacramentals and exercises of Christian popular piety are extremely helpful. These latter exercises – which "while not belonging to the Liturgy in the strict sense, possess nonetheless a particular importance and dignity" – are to be regarded as having a certain connection with the liturgical context, especially when they have been lauded and attested by the Magisterium itself,[103] as is the case especially of the Marian Rosary.[104] Furthermore, since these practices of piety lead the Christian people both to the reception of the sacraments – especially the Eucharist – and "to meditation on the mysteries of our Redemption and the imitation of the excellent heavenly examples of the Saints, they are therefore not without salutary effects for our participation in liturgical worship".[105]

[42.] It must be acknowledged that the Church has not come together by human volition; rather, she has been called together by God in the Holy Spirit, and she responds through faith to his free calling (thus the word *ekklesia* is related to *klesis*, or "calling").[106] Nor is the Eucharistic Sacrifice to be considered a "concelebration", in the univocal sense, of the Priest along with the people who are present.[107] On the contrary, the Eucharist celebrated by the Priests "is a gift which radically transcends the power of the community. . . . The community that gathers for the celebration of the Eucharist absolutely requires an ordained Priest, who presides over it so that it may truly be a eucharistic convocation. On the other hand, the community is by itself incapable of providing an ordained minister".[108] There is pressing need of a concerted will to avoid all ambiguity in this matter and to remedy the difficulties of recent years. Accordingly, terms such as "celebrating community" or "celebrating assembly" (in other languages "asamblea celebrante", "assemblée célébrante", *assemblea celebrante*) and similar terms should not be used injudiciously.

Footnotes

[87] Cf. *ibidem*, n. 41; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, n. 11; Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum ordinis*, nn. 2,5,6; Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops, *Christus Dominus*, n. 30, Decree on

Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, 21 November 1964, n. 15; S. Congregation of Rites, Instruction *Eucharisticum mysterium*, nn. 3e, 6: AAS 59 (1967) pp. 542, 544-545; Missale Romanum, Institutio Generalis, n. 16.

[88] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 26; Missale Romanum, Institutio Generalis, n. 91.

[89] *I Pet* 2,9; cf. 2,4-5.

[90] Missale Romanum, Institutio Generalis, n. 91; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 41.

[91] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, n. 10.

[92] Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, q. 63, a. 2.

[93] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, n. 10; cf. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, On the Eucharist, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 28: AAS 95 (2003) p. 452.

[94] Cf. *Acts* 2,42-47.

[95] Cf. *Rom* 12,1.

[96] Cf. *I Pet* 3,15; 2,4-10.

[97] Cf. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, nn. 12-18: AAS 95 (2003) p. 441-445; Letter *Dominicae Cenaе*, 24 February 1980, n. 9: AAS 72 (1980) pp. 129-133.

[98] Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 10: AAS 95 (2003) p. 439.

[99] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, nn. 30-31.

[100] Cf. S. Congregation for Divine Worship, Instruction *Liturgicae instaurationes*, n. 1: AAS 62 (1970) p. 695.

[101] Cf. Missale Romanum, Feria secunda post Dominica V in Quadragesima, Collecta, p. 258.

[102] Cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, 6 January 2001, n. 21: AAS 93 (2001) p. 280; cf. *Jn* 20,28.

[103] Cf. Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mediator Dei*: AAS 39 (1947) p. 586; cf. also Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, n. 67; Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Mariialis cultus*, 11 February 1974, n. 24: AAS 66 (1974) pp. 113-168, here p. 134; Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Direttorio su pietà popolare e Liturgia*, 17 December 2001.

[104] Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 16 October 2002: AAS 95 (2003) pp. 5-36.

[105] Cf. Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mediator Dei*: AAS 39 (1947) p. 586-587.

[106] Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Instruction, *Varietates legitimae*, n. 22: AAS 87 (1995) p. 297.

[107] Cf. Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter, *Mediator Dei*: AAS 39 (1947) p. 553.

[108] Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 29: AAS 95 (2003) p. 453; cf. Fourth Lateran Ecumenical Council, 11-30 November 1215, Chapter I: DS 802; Ecumenical Council of Trent, Session XXIII, 15 July 1563, Doctrine and Canons on Sacred Order, Chapter 4: DS 1767-1770; Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter, *Mediator Dei*: AAS 39 (1947) p. 553.