

Articles

“In the obedience of faith and with religious respect for the mystery of the liturgy” (CCC 1125)—Reflections on Authority in Liturgy Today

Liturgical integrity is a principle which guards the sacred liturgy from the exigencies of personal whim or ill-exercised authority.

by Dom Alciun Reid, O.S.B.



In some Anglican circles the acronym “WVL” raises a smile. It is not infrequently employed when visiting clergy ask about the type of service celebrated in a given church or chapel. It stands, of course, for “What the Vicar likes”.

One could be forgiven in recent decades—indeed for far too many of them now—for suggesting that a similar acronym “WPL” could be fairly widely applicable in the Roman rite of the Catholic Church, where “P” could stand for “priest,” “pastor,” or even “pope.” For if we ask where we find authority in liturgy today, too often the response must be that it is located in an unprincipled exercise of autocratic or

even dilettantish positivism in response to personal desires or extrinsic agendas that demonstrate little, if any, obedience of faith or religious respect for the mystery of the sacred liturgy.

Allow me to recall some familiar examples. Let us leave to one side the many such instances arising from priests and pastors—they are without doubt legion—and simply attend to some arising from popes.

The inaugural years of St. John Paul II’s papacy were marked by a much-needed reestablishment of discipline in many areas of the life of the church. It came as no real surprise, then, that the April 17, 1980 Instruction of the Sacred Congregation of the Sacraments and Divine Worship,

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Inestimabile Donum, ruled that: “[w]omen are not . . . permitted to act as altar servers.”¹ What did come as a surprise was the reversal of this by means of a June 30, 1992 authentic interpretation of canon 230 §2 by the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts, confirmed by the same pope the following July 11, and communicated by the Congregation for Divine worship two years later (March 15, 1994),² declaring that service at the altar is one of the liturgical functions that can be performed by both lay men and women.

In the same period the Congregation for Divine Worship consistently insisted, in reply after reply, that in respect of the washing of women’s feet on Holy Thursday, the word in the relevant rubric, “viri,” meant “viri”—“men,” meant “men.” And yet, as we know, many pastors, priests and even a number of bishops did not like this and acted according to their own preferences. When one such was elected Bishop of Rome, we got “what the Pope wants”—a decree of the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (January 6, 2016) establishing that “pastors can choose a small group of the faithful who represent the variety and unity of each portion of the people of God”—a group that “can consist of men and women, and conveniently of young and old, healthy and sick, clerics, consecrated, lay people.” Given what the Pope in fact does on Maundy Thursday one might be forgiven for asking why this decree apparently still limits the members of this group to Christians?

¹Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Inestimabile Donum*, April 17, 1980, ¶18.

²*Notitiae* 30 (1994), 333–35.

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I do not wish to focus unduly on the content of these changes in liturgical discipline. I raise them in order to ask: on what basis, according to what principles, were they made?

were they made? For, I would submit that, in respect of Catholic liturgy, refashioning the rites according to what the priest, pastor, pope, or for that matter any individual, likes is simply not sufficient.

Permit me one further example. In his General Audience address of November 26, 1969, St. Paul VI spoke of the “the liturgical innovation of the new rite of the Mass” that was to come into effect the following weekend as a “many-sided inconvenience” likely to bring about “the kind of upset caused by every novelty that breaks in on our habit,” especially amongst “pious persons” and even, possibly amongst some priests. It is perhaps difficult to ascribe this

change simply to “what the pope likes,” for not only is there some evidence that Paul VI did not like aspects of the reform he himself promulgated,³ he also asserts—in the same address—more significant motivations:

It is Christ’s will, it is the breath of the Holy Spirit which calls the Church to make this change. A prophetic moment is occurring in the mystical body of Christ, which is the Church. This moment is shaking the Church, arousing it, obliging it to renew the mysterious art of its prayer . . .

This renewal of prayer . . . is aimed at associating the assembly of the faithful more closely and more effectively with the official rite, that of the Word and that of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, that constitutes the Mass. For the faithful are also invested with the “royal priesthood”; that is, they are qualified to have supernatural conversation with God.

These are serious motivations, and surely, it is most certainly for the pope to judge the measures appropriate for their implementation. As we know and believe as a doctrine of the Catholic Faith, “in virtue of his office, that is as Vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole Church, the Roman Pontiff has

³See the anecdotes contained in Leonardo Sapienza, ed., *Paolo VI: Una storia minima* (Monopoli: Edizione Viverein, 2018); see also the remarks of Virgilio Cardinal Noé, Master of Pontifical Ceremonies from 1970–1982, given in a 2008 interview with Bruno Volpe on the website *Petrus*, available in an archived version at <https://web.archive.org/web/20080926084027/http://papanews.it/dettaglio_interviste.asp?IdNews=7624>.

full, supreme and universal power over the Church.”⁴ He is the Supreme Legislator in the church, from whose rulings there is no appeal.⁵ To the Successor of Peter belongs the power of binding and loosing on earth and in heaven.⁶

Given this teaching, be it in respect of altar girls, the washing of the feet of women (or even non-Christians) on Maundy Thursday, or be it the substantial reform of the entire liturgy itself, one could be forgiven for thinking that the entire Catholic liturgy is utterly subject to “what the pope likes,” indeed in modern times to what *this* or *that* particular pope likes. If that is the case, if the Supreme Authority is able to exercise his authority simply to impose his will or personal preference in respect of the sacred liturgy, then it is utterly understandable that what the bishop, priest, deacon, MC, musical director, liturgy committee, or any other individual “likes” may similarly be imposed by means of whatever measure of authority they have, share, or have arrogated unto themselves in a given situation. Where this prevails it is, of course, as in Anglicanism, important to associate with others with similar “likes” so as to avoid unpleasanties!

But is this right? Is such subjectivism, so akin to the Anglican milieu in which the phrase “what the Vicar likes” has meaning, tolerable for Catholic liturgy? Is doing my own thing, even if I am convinced that it is right and good—or even “traditional”—within the bounds of legitimate liturgical

⁴Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), ¶22; see also *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ¶937.

⁵Canon 331 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law.

⁶Matthew 16:18–19.

diversity, or does it damage the “substantial unity of the Roman rite”?⁷

The Objectivity of Catholic Liturgical Tradition

Or does Catholic liturgy enjoy an objectivity that precedes personal preference, be that the preference of a pope or of any other person?

Paragraph 1124 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches:

The Church’s faith precedes the faith of the believer who is invited to adhere to it. When the Church celebrates the sacraments, she confesses the faith received from the apostles—whence the ancient saying: *lex orandi, lex credendi* (or: *legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi* according to Prosper of Aquitaine [5th cent, Ep. 8]). The law of prayer is the law of faith: the Church believes as she prays. Liturgy is a constitutive element of the holy and living Tradition. [cf. *Dei Verbum* n. 8].

Prescinding for the moment from the issue of the deeply troubling exegesis of the premise *lex orandi, lex credendi* by Pope Pius XII in his encyclical letter *Mediator Dei* (November 20, 1947) whereby this teaching is effectively reversed so that he advocates that we “let the rule of belief determine the rule of prayer,”⁸ we must underline here the reality that “[l]iturgy is a constitutive element of the holy and living Tradition.” The liturgy, the liturgical rites themselves,

⁷See Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacro-sanctum Concilium* (December 4, 1963), ¶ 38.

⁸Pius XII, Encyclical on the Sacred Liturgy, *Mediator Dei* (November 20, 1947), ¶48.

are an intrinsic part of the handing on of the faith received from the apostles. They are not mere decoration or ornament. The rites and prayers that have developed in the life of the church are sacred vessels which bring apostolic tradition to us. Thus they are privileged sacramentals worthy of profound respect.

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That is why Catholic liturgy is sacred. That is why Catholic liturgy is not that which any individual or group “likes” to do, but is what *we* do *ecclesially*, in accordance with what is handed on to us in tradition. That is why the sacred liturgy enjoys a *theological* objectivity and cannot be altered without the greatest of prudence and due proportionality. That is why the subsequent paragraph of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches:

For this reason no sacramental rite may be modified or manipulated at the will of

the minister or the community. Even the supreme authority in the Church may not change the liturgy arbitrarily, but only in the obedience of faith and with religious respect for the mystery of the liturgy.⁹

There are two elements of this teaching to be underlined. In the first place “even the supreme authority . . . may not change the liturgy arbitrarily.” Death comes thus to the principle “WPL,” whether we be speaking of a priest, pastor, pope, or any other person.

The limits of papal power in respect of the sacred liturgy, taught authoritatively here by St. John Paul II in the *Catechism* he promulgated, were elaborated eloquently by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger shortly before his own election to the See of Peter:

The Pope is not an absolute monarch whose will is law, but is the guardian of the authentic Tradition, and thereby the premier guarantor of obedience. He cannot do as he likes, and is thereby able to oppose those people who for their part want to do what has come into their head. His rule is not that of arbitrary power, but that of obedience in faith. That is why, with respect to the Liturgy, he has the task of a gardener, not that of a technician who builds new machines and throws the old ones on the junk-pile. The “rite,” that form of celebration and prayer which has ripened in the faith and the life of the Church, is a condensed form of living tradition in which the sphere which uses that rite expresses the whole of its faith and its prayer, and thus at the same time the fellowship of gener-

ations one with another becomes something we can experience, fellowship with the people who pray before us and after us. Thus the rite is something of benefit which is given to the Church, a living form of *paradosis*, the handing-on of tradition.¹⁰

Pope Benedict XVI, when taking possession of the *cathedra* of the Bishop of Rome, applied this principle in respect of the exercise of all papal authority with a clarity and a humility that betokened the greatness of his pontificate:

The power that Christ conferred upon Peter and his Successors is, in an absolute sense, a mandate to serve. The power of teaching in the Church involves a commitment to the service of obedience to the faith. The Pope is not an absolute monarch whose thoughts and desires are law. On the contrary: the Pope’s ministry is a guarantee of obedience to Christ and to his Word. He must not proclaim his own ideas, but rather constantly bind himself and the Church to obedience to God’s Word, in the face of every attempt to adapt it or water it down, and every form of opportunism.¹¹

The ministry of the pope, therefore, is one of obedience to the Word of God. In respect of the sacred liturgy, this ministry is exercised, as the catechism teaches, in the

⁹*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ¶1125.

¹⁰Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Preface to Alcuin Reid, *The Organic Development of the Liturgy*, 2nd edition (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), pp. 10–11.

¹¹Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, Mass of the Possession of the Chair of the Bishop of Rome, St. John Lateran, May 11, 2005.

obedience of faith and with religious respect for the mystery of the liturgy. “The Pope is not an absolute monarch whose thoughts and desires are law.” *Mutatis mutandis*, neither is any bishop, priest, deacon, MC, musical director, liturgy committee, or any other group or individual, no matter what their position or expertise.

This brings us face to face with the second element of what is taught in paragraph 1125 of the catechism: “the obedience of faith” and “religious respect for the mystery of the liturgy” that must be shown by all, from the pope down.

Earlier I asserted that there was a disturbing issue in respect of Pope Pius XII’s exegesis of the premise *lex orandi, lex credendi* in *Mediator Dei*, whereby he asserts that it is the rule of belief which determines the rule of prayer, and not the other way around. When this was published in 1947 the dangers inherent in this reversal may not have been all that apparent. Sadly, they have become all too clear in the ensuing decades.

For if the sacred liturgy (its rites, prayers, chants, and associated arts, etc.) are a “a constitutive element of the holy and living Tradition,” this organism, as handed on in tradition, is itself an essential source for experiencing the Catholic faith and for knowing and reflecting upon what we believe: the sacred liturgy is itself *theologia prima*.¹² However, if *what we believe* determines the rule of prayer, the liturgy can (or ought to) be refashioned according to changes in theology so as to reflect the latter. It is no longer a primary source of

¹²David W. Fagerburg, “Liturgical Theology,” in Alcuin Reid, ed., *T&T Clark Companion to Liturgy* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), pp. 3–20.

theology, but its mirror.

Again, this may not have seemed so dangerous a thing to say in 1947, but by 1967 when what Catholics believed seemed at best to be in flux and at worst in utter turmoil, its potential to underpin a concomitant liturgical revolution was clear. Indeed by 1977 this principle’s potential had been exploited at the official level with a new set of liturgical books reflecting a new theology. At a local level, with very little exercise of liturgical discipline by competent

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authority, there were extremes: Catholic liturgy was widely regarded as a subjective matter for the local community to “plan,” using even the modern liturgical books with all their options as mere resources rather than receiving them as containing the liturgy given by the church to be celebrated faithfully. What was believed determined how we prayed: the divergent paucity of the former informed the radical diversity of the latter. There were notable exceptions, of course, but this problem was widespread in both parishes, seminaries, and religious communities and, as we know, it manifested itself no more clearly than in the realm of liturgical music.

How could such a lack of “the obedience of faith” and “religious respect for the mystery of the liturgy” come to pass? The analysis of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger is insightful. He attributes it to:

A neo-scholastic sacramental theology which is disconnected from the living form of the Liturgy. On that basis, people might reduce the “substance” to the matter and form of the sacrament, and say: Bread and wine are the matter of the sacrament, the words of institution are its form. Only these two things are really necessary, everything else is changeable.¹³

This observation is crucial in understanding the liturgical crisis. And it explains a great deal about how many otherwise orthodox clergy, religious, and laity accepted unacceptable changes to and mutilations of the sacred liturgy following the Second Vatican Council and for decades thereafter, up to our own day. For if one can reduce the sacraments to valid matter and the correct form in one’s mind, one may ignore, disdain or even abuse the rites that surround them. The liturgical rites become incidentals and are therefore unimportant in themselves. They contain no authority in their own right and certainly demand no serious respect. They may be reduced, refashioned, replaced or dispensed according to the prevailing theological and ideological trends of a given time, whether that be by popes or their commissars, by episcopal conferences, local bishops, priests, or lay liturgical potentates.

Cardinal Ratzinger observed further that:

¹³Ratzinger, Preface, 11.

The Liturgical Movement had in fact been attempting to overcome this reductionism, the product of an abstract sacramental theology, and to teach us to understand the Liturgy as a living network of tradition which had taken concrete form, which cannot be torn apart into little pieces, but has to be seen and experienced as a living whole. Anyone like myself, who was moved by this perception in the time of the Liturgical Movement on the eve of the Second Vatican Council, can only stand, deeply sorrowing, before the ruins of the very things they were concerned for.¹⁴

These are strong words. But it is a fact that subjectivity, not objectivity, has been the lot of the sacred liturgy for far too long, from the pre-conciliar disdain of sung or solemn Mass as being “too much unnecessary fuss” (the expression “It’s the Low Mass that matters!” comes right out of this stable . . .), to the liturgy being regarded as something which I may translate, celebrate, and adapt according to our—or even my own—preferences, to the unforeseeable horizons of the proposed “organic progression of the liturgy” which embraces radical inculturation and more.¹⁵ Even more conservative or so-called “traditional” circles, not infrequently go beyond the bounds of what is given to us by the church and select, adapt, or ignore rites according to subjective will. I shall return to that peculiar behavior a little later.

Cardinal Ratzinger’s incisive analysis of the liturgical crisis of the church before,

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵See: Anscar Chupungco, O.S.B., “Inculturation and the Organic Progression of the Liturgy,” *Ecclesia Orans*, 7, no. 1 (1990), 7–21.

during and after the Second Vatican Council caused him much grief and pain, certainly, as it should do us all. But it did not immerse him in a debilitating depression. Both through his personal writings and his example, teaching and governance as the successor of Saint Peter, he underlined the objectivity of liturgical tradition in line with his call some twenty years ago for a renewed discovery and appreciation of the same—for “a movement toward the Liturgy and toward the right way of celebrating the Liturgy, inwardly and outwardly,”¹⁶ for what we call today “the new liturgical movement”.

A “Higher Law”—Liturgical Integrity

How should anyone with authority, great or small, in respect of the sacred liturgy behave? How ought the new liturgical movement to proceed when faced with a diversity of liturgical practice, ambiguity in and disregard of liturgical law, and a plethora of supposed “customs” which at times amount to little more than established disobedience? How can we manifest “the obedience of faith” and “religious respect for the mystery of the liturgy” that its very nature demands?

I wish to propose a working principle, a “higher law” if I may call it thus, which I believe will serve us well in this endeavor no matter in which part of the Lord’s vineyard we labor or no matter which use of the Roman or other rites we celebrate. It is the principle of liturgical integrity. This encompasses integrity in respect of the objective nature of the sacred liturgy; integrity in respect of its legitimate development; integrity in respect of the pertinent decisions of

¹⁶Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), pp. 8–9.

legitimate authority.

Liturgical integrity rejects subjectivism in all its forms, be that the visiting of theological or ideological impositions upon the sacred liturgy, or be that an archaeologism that would idiosyncratically take us back to the fifth century, to a given date in the nineteenth or twentieth century, or to any other supposed period of liturgical purity, disregarding later developments and eschewing their value *a priori*. Liturgical integrity refuses the arrogation of an authority in respect of the celebration of liturgical rites to oneself that the church herself has not given one. Liturgical integrity makes of us faithful servants of the sacred liturgy, not her masters or proprietors.

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Liturgical integrity rejects the cancer of minimalism and seeks to fulfill the injunction of St. Thomas Aquinas to “dare to do as much as possible”¹⁷ in praise of him whose

¹⁷“Quantum potes, tantum aude: / Quia major omni laude, / Nec laudare súfficis” [All thou canst, do thou endeavour: / Yet thy praise can equal never / Such as merits thy great King]. See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Lauda Sion*, Sequence for the Feast of Corpus Christi.

mysteries the sacred liturgy celebrates. It looks first and foremost to the glory of almighty God, not to the reaffirmation of quotidian man—indeed it is contemporary man that liturgical integrity is intent upon changing, not the sacred liturgy. It seeks to know and learn liturgical law and faithfully to observe its detailed prescriptions, “love’s little rules.” Liturgical integrity seeks to bring to the fore all that is true, beautiful, and good and to offer it anew to its creator. Liturgical integrity requires that we do nothing arbitrarily or in haste, but that we approach the sacred liturgy having first removed our shoes and act “only in the obedience of faith” and “with religious respect” for its profound mystery.

The Practice of Liturgical Integrity

- i. In the exercise of authority in respect of the sacred liturgy.

What does this mean for those who exercise legitimate authority in respect of the sacred liturgy: the pope, the bishops, episcopal conferences, and for those who assist these authorities in this ministry?

In the first place, it is necessary to say that “WPL”—what the pope likes—is an inadequate basis for liturgical legislation or reform, be the matter large or small. There is no doubt that the pope enjoys the *positive legal authority* to legislate in respect of the sacred liturgy, and many popes have appositely done so to our day. It would be difficult to say that the Holy Father’s 2016 elevation of the memorial of St. Mary Magdalen to the rank of a feast lacked liturgical integrity: it was, surely, another example of the legitimate, incremental development of the liturgy. But a very different view could

be taken of the papal decisions to sanction decades of disobedience of the use of altar girls or the washing of women’s feet on Maundy Thursday.

So too, the integrity (in respect of the sacred liturgy itself, not necessarily in respect of the intentions of the individuals concerned) of the promulgation of a wholesale reform of the liturgy predicated on the supposed needs of modern man, going even on paper far beyond the measures called for by the Second Vatican Council, and going even further still in its local implementation and practice, may be questioned. Disproportionately to change the *lex orandi* is to endanger the *lex credendi*. As the decades have rolled on the statistics have increasingly confirmed that the motivations for a liturgical reform enunciated by the council¹⁸ have not been realized. The inconvenience and sacrifice judged necessary by St. Paul VI to enact such a measure has, in the end, not paid the expected dividends. The “springtime” of the liturgy and of ecclesial life anticipated by the Vatican II reformers was very brief, if it arrived at all. Its summer scorched and its autumn has been very long, as is its winter.

Papal positivism in respect of the liturgy has gotten us nowhere. Indeed, it has set us back significantly. In such a situation liturgical integrity surely demands that authority urgently make a frank and honest assessment of the current situation, with a preparedness to accept the failures of recent decades and an openness to making the necessary corrections to liturgical practice today. Pretending that the emperor is clad in rich clothing when in fact he is likely to die of cold is not integrity.

¹⁸*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶1.

He who exercises authority in respect of the sacred liturgy must himself, first and foremost, be a liturgical worshipper, already caught up in the feast of the love of God that is the splendor of the sacred liturgy. He must be free from such neo-scholastic reductionism as has been described above. That is to say, he must know and love the sacred liturgy from within, not regard it from without as a mere public duty or a burdensome chore.

That is why the father of the new liturgical movement, Cardinal Ratzinger, could write a book so eloquent as *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, and speak so intimately therein of such things as the importance of kneeling. That is why Robert Cardinal Sarah so energetically proposes the necessary rediscovery of the celebration of Mass *ad orientem* and the reception of holy communion kneeling and on the tongue. That is why Archbishop Alexander Sample was able to promulgate a pastoral letter on sacred music that is second to none in its clarity and integrity. That is why St. John Paul II insisted that the vernacular translations of the liturgy be accurate. That is why Pope Benedict XVI could not but promulgate the measures contained in his Motu Proprio *Summorum Pontificum* (July 7, 2007). These great and holy men have not done so as authorities imposing their personal ecclesio-political stance or ideology, but as believers whose first concern is the worship of almighty God, and as believers who know with integrity from within the good that these practices betoken and promote.

Every exercise of authority in respect of the sacred liturgy must have such integrity. All whose duty it is thus to serve would do well to examine their consciences according to the principles outlined by Pope Benedict

(already cited above):

The Pope is not an absolute monarch whose thoughts and desires are law . . . The Pope's ministry is a guarantee of obedience to Christ and to his Word. He must not proclaim his own ideas, but rather constantly bind himself and the Church to obedience to God's Word, in the face of every attempt to adapt it or water it down, and every form of opportunism.

So too, in their celebration of the sacred liturgy those with authority must be exemplars of good practice. It simply will not do if a pope or bishop celebrates the liturgy perfunctorily, as if it is a chore to be accomplished as quickly as possible. Nor is it acceptable if he commands our obedience in matters liturgical, or indeed in any matter, whilst himself failing to observe the proper liturgical norms. To do this would be an abuse and a true source of scandal.

Rather than being an arbitrary lord, as the General Instruction of the Roman Missal of Paul VI insists:

The Diocesan Bishop, the prime steward of the mysteries of God in the particular Church entrusted to his care, is the moderator, promoter, and guardian of the whole of liturgical life. In celebrations that take place with the Bishop presiding, and especially in the celebration of the Eucharist by the Bishop himself with the Presbyterate, the Deacons, and the people taking part, the mystery of the Church is manifest. Hence, solemn celebrations of Mass of this sort must be exemplary for the entire diocese.

The Bishop should therefore be determined

that the Priests, the Deacons, and the lay Christian faithful grasp ever more deeply the genuine significance of the rites and liturgical texts, and thereby be led to the active and fruitful celebration of the Eucharist. To that end, he should also be vigilant in ensuring that the dignity of these celebrations be enhanced and, in promoting such dignity, the beauty of the sacred place, of the music, and of art should contribute as greatly as possible.¹⁹

Let us not cease to pray for our bishops, including the bishop of Rome, that they might realize ever more perfectly this fundamental element of their vocation.

ii. In the celebration of the *usus recentior* of the Roman rite

How is one to practice liturgical integrity in respect of the modern use of the Roman rite—its *usus recentior*—particularly when its pedigree may be said to be far from integral?

Liturgical integrity is realistic. The *usus recentior* is here and it is not going to disappear any time soon. Yes, its production was not organic; yes, its texts even before they were or are badly or better translated into the vernacular have been passed through an ideological sieve of 1960's vintage which has robbed them of much of their theological content, and yes, the newly composed ones reflect the limitations of that same period; and certainly, there are other issues. But the modern Roman rite is a reality with which we must deal—it has become a part of contemporary liturgical tradition, even if as a mutant progeny. We may either leave it

¹⁹General Instruction of the Roman Missal, ¶22.

aside for the older rites or we must celebrate it as well as is possible—the latter being most often the case for the pastoral clergy. What we may not do, if we are to celebrate it with integrity, is to adapt it beyond the limits of its own laws. That is to say, it is a rite with its own principles and coherence which must not itself be abused, even seemingly for the good, no matter what we think of it.

The clearest exposé of the liturgical integrity required in respect of the *usus recentior* may be found in Pope Benedict XVI's Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, most particularly in the section in which he describes the *ars celebrandi*, the “art of proper celebration” of the liturgy.²⁰ Pope Benedict insists:

The primary way to foster the participation of the People of God in the sacred rite is the proper celebration of the rite itself. The *ars celebrandi* is the best way to ensure their *actuosa participatio*. The *ars celebrandi* is the fruit of faithful adherence to the liturgical norms in all their richness; indeed, for two thousand years this way of celebrating has sustained the faith life of all believers, called to take part in the celebration as the People of God, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (cf. 1 Pet. 9:5–24).²¹

The elevated vision of *Sacramentum Caritatis* is a testament to liturgical integrity calling the church to the celebration of the *usus recentior* according to that hermeneutic of continuity with liturgical tradition which it so desperately needs. All those involved

²⁰Post-synodal Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (February 22, 2007), ¶¶38 and following.

²¹*Ibid.*, ¶38.

in the celebration and preparation of this use of the Roman Rite, its ceremonies and music, should know and share this vision.

Thus formed, the many practical choices one frequently must make amongst the plethora of options available shall be informed by the mind of the church herself. We will come to know what the sacred liturgy is ritually and theologically and be equipped to insist on the employment of means appropriate to its worthy celebration. So too, we shall be prepared to recognize what is inappropriate to the liturgy and to exercise our duty to say “no” to proposals that are unworthy, howsoever well-motivated.

We shall be clear that singing the liturgy and not singing at the liturgy is our God-given ministry, and that singing the liturgy in a manner that is harmonious with it and with the other musical pieces and arrangements chosen for a given celebration is what is required—a Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei each from a different Mass in the gradual or each by a different polyphonic composer might do more to connote a concert rather than liturgical worship.

The practice of liturgical integrity requires nothing less of us than this. Given that the local practice of *usus recentior* is almost as varied as there are parishes and churches, and given that the adjective “pastoral” when applied to the liturgy has too often come to mean its deformation or abuse—we must never forget that truly pastoral liturgy is the liturgy of the church optimally celebrated²²—our task is by no means easy, and shall require much patience, char-

²²Alcuin Reid, “Pastoral Liturgy Revisited,” in Alcuin Reid, ed., *T&T Clark Companion to Liturgy* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), pp. 341–363.

ity, and humility. It also requires determination and perseverance so that “the fruit of faithful adherence to the liturgical norms in all their richness”—the full, conscious and actual participation of all the faithful in the sacred liturgy²³—may be achieved.

When considering the *ars celebrandi*, the question of the “mutual enrichment” of the *usus recentior* often arises. How are we to approach this sensitive question with integrity?

I hope that we are clear that integrity eschews “WPL”—I am simply not free to do what I personally want with the sacred liturgy. I must therefore resist the temptation to indulge in liturgical practices that may in many ways be desirable but which do involve crossing a line: liturgical law is liturgical law and if I am to behave with integrity I owe it obedience. If I chose to be disobedient, even to a good end, I become part of the problem.

Having stated this principle, for a practical consideration of the enrichment of the *usus recentior* I can do no better than recommend the study of this question presented to *Sacra Liturgia* New York in 2015 by Father Thomas Kocik and published in its proceedings *Liturgy in the Twenty-First Century*.²⁴ It is not exhaustive of course, but its proposals are carefully argued with an integrity that is exemplary.

If we approach the *usus recentior* of the Roman rite with such integrity we shall do much to enhance its liturgical efficacy. Yes, the larger questions in respect of it remain, and they must not be ignored, but whilst

²³*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶14.

²⁴Thomas Kocik, “The Reform of the Reform,” in Alcuin Reid, ed., *Liturgy in the Twenty First Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 19–50.

it remains in place it must be celebrated as well as is possible, for the glory of almighty God and for the sanctification of his people.

iii. In the celebration of the *usus antiquior* of the Roman rite

Indeed, liturgical integrity is ambitious for the best. It seeks to give to almighty God as much as we possibly can, and in this light it is easy to see why so many young people embrace the *usus antiquior* of the Roman rite—its more ancient form—as something rich, new, challenging, and fulfilling as they seek to worship and follow Christ in the post-modern world of the twenty first century. Pope Benedict XVI knew this when, now twelve years ago, he sought to effect “an interior reconciliation in the heart of the Church” by establishing that:

What earlier generations held as sacred, remains sacred and great for us too, and it cannot be all of a sudden entirely forbidden or even considered harmful. It behooves all of us to preserve the riches which have developed in the Church’s faith and prayer, and to give them their proper place.²⁵

The growing importance of the *usus antiquior* in the liturgical life of the church is a reality. But here too, it is essential that we approach the sacred rites with humility and integrity, for today it is just as easy to treat them according to subjective preferences and opinions as it has been to fashion the modern rites into my own image and likeness. Due prudence is required: care-

²⁵Letter to the Bishops accompanying the *Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum*, July 7, 2007.

ful study is necessary. Not every picture or practice advocated on the internet is correct or to be imitated. And, as in any celebration of the sacred liturgy, my personal judgment of what should or should not be in the given liturgical books is not sufficient grounds for departing from them.

There is no question, of course, that the abuses of the years following the Second Vatican Council pushed many faithful Catholics “over the edge,” and the concerted efforts to forbid the older rites in those years created a situation in which disobedience was judged necessary by some. For any Catholic that is a most dire situa-

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tion, for obedience to due authority is a virtue deeply to be cherished. Liturgically, the *usus antiquior* where it was celebrated, was without the paternal oversight of authority: what the priest did was what he thought he should. Some (including the Society of St. Pius X) simply adopted the last set of liturgical books in use before the council, others used earlier versions before the reforms of Pope Pius XII. One priest in England

whom it was my privilege to know used the Sarum Missal, at least in part.

One does not in any way wish to judge the stances adopted by any of these priests in such an extraordinary situation in the life of the church. They were terrible years. But thanks to the work of St. John Paul II, completed by Pope Benedict XVI, those years are over. The *usus antiquior* is a stable part of the liturgical life of the church and remains so under the current Holy Father. Given the number of young people deeply attached to, or indeed entirely formed and immersed in, its riches and culture, it would be impossible, in practice, for any pope to reverse that.

In this situation, how, then, are we to celebrate the *usus antiquior* with integrity? For it is a fact that many who celebrate it, formed in the optionalism inherent in the *usus recentior*, can at times treat the older liturgical rites with a subjectivism that is utterly alien to their nature: what the priest (or MC, or whoever) likes, not what the liturgical books say, sometimes informs how the *usus antiquior* is celebrated.

This often arises because of a heightened consciousness of the intrigues of pre-conciliar liturgical reform which are sometimes uncritically denigrated wholesale with the attendant danger of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. So too the word “custom” is often invoked. Apart from the fact that those invoking custom in this way are often seeking to revive practices that have long-since ceased to be observed (and sometimes, if not often, with good reason) and which are therefore in no sense customary, we would do well to ponder the maxim of St. Cyprian of Carthage (†258): “*Consuetudo sine veritate, vetustas erroris est*”—a custom without truth is simply error grown

old.²⁶ *Without truth, without integrity, customs hold little importance—above all for the sacred liturgy.*

And sometimes well-meaning individuals or groups will decide to advance the *usus antiquior*, adopting the vernacular where it is not permitted or choosing to accept some later ritual reforms which seem to make sense to them, but not others. This *à la carte* approach to the older liturgical rites is, ironically, a relatively widespread phenomenon.

Here it must be said that we cannot be said to be acting with integrity if we arrogate to ourselves authority that is simply not ours, no matter how good our motivation. Indeed, the reformed rite of priestly ordination includes an explicit promise “to celebrate the mysteries of Christ faithfully and religiously as the Church has handed them down to us for the glory of God and the sanctification of Christ’s people”—something implicit, surely, in the older rite of ordination.

I am perhaps reasonably qualified to evaluate the pre- and post-conciliar liturgical reforms and could, I hope, make appropriate proposals to competent authority for any needed adjustments to the liturgical books. But I cannot, on my own authority, implement what I think should be the case. Integrity demands that I and those under my authority follow the official liturgical books (in our case as authorized by *Summorum Pontificum* and the Instruction on its implementation, *Universæ Ecclesiæ*, April

²⁶It would be possible to say this, for example, of those who insist on the priest “doubling” the readings of sacred scripture at solemn Mass, even though they are sung by the subdeacon and deacon—a practice happily and rightly reformed in the 1960 code of rubrics.

30, 2011). To do otherwise could well be to fall into the temptation articulated so clearly by T.S. Eliot in *Murder in the Cathedral*, when he writes of this “last act” as being “the greatest treason. To do the right deed for the wrong reason.”

In 2018 our little monastery, after much

The subjectivism that has blighted our liturgical life for too long, and which is with us still—on all sides—must be banished.

patience, was the first to receive the permission of the Holy See to celebrate Holy Week and the Vigil of Pentecost according to the *Missale Romanum* promulgated in 1953, and it was a joy and a blessing to celebrate these rich and beautiful rites—even if it made clear that some small elements of them were rightly reformed. But to celebrate them without permission would have been to act without integrity, as would it be to pick and choose elements of pre- or post-conciliar rites and cut them from or paste them into the liturgical books in force according to my personal judgment or preference.

No, integrity demands that we celebrate the *usus antiquior* as the church gives it to us today. If obedience to this precept requires the setting aside preferences, let that offer-

ing be made in charity. If I believe that permission should be given to depart from the liturgical books in force, let me set out my petition to due authority with all humility and patience. To do anything other is to be less than Catholic.

Conclusion

Obedience of faith and religious respect for the mystery of the sacred liturgy calls us to integrity in all our approaches to the sacred liturgy, be we pope, priest, layperson or anywhere in between. The subjectivism that has blighted our liturgical life for too long, and which is with us still—on all sides—must be banished. We must become humble ministers of the great mystery of the liturgy, that it might do its salvific work in the world unimpeded by personal desires or extrinsic agendas, no matter what their motivations.

To this end we could do no better than to pray, with fervent hearts, the words of the hymn from Friday vespers:

Repelle a servis tuis
quidquid per immunditiam
aut moribus se suggerit
aut actibus se interserit.

Drive far from all your servants here
whatever through impurity
shall make its way into our acts
or plant itself in habits formed. ❖