

NOTES FOR CARDINALS/6

The Church must combat liturgical apartheid and abuse

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The mission of the Church derives from her relationship with her Spouse and has as its goal to bring every human being into that nuptial relationship. According to the teaching of Revelation, the liturgy of the Church is a foretaste of this marriage. It is at the same

time an incessant training to learn the voice of the Bride as she speaks to her Spouse and to enter into this relationship with respect and love. The quality of the Church's liturgy, the way it is understood and celebrated, is perhaps the most important indicator of the 'health' of her relationship with Christ and her understanding of the purpose of her existence: the aid to the poor will cease, the mission will come to an end, but the liturgy is the meaning and the act of eternity.

This voice of the Bride has been degraded by the constant personal initiatives of priests, groups and even bishops who consider the liturgy as a laboratory in which to give free rein to their creativity, thus forcing the faithful to endure the arbitrary tastes of those who, instead of serving the Church's liturgy, use it for other, more or less noble purposes. A realistic view of the liturgical situation can only lead to the sad conclusion that in the Church today the voice of the Bride is seldom heard, replaced or stifled by voices that "smell of the world"; the situation can be summed up as follows: every Church has its own Mass.

This proliferation of arbitrariness is often accompanied by the even more serious problem of liturgical abuses which, beyond all limits of tolerance, have debased the mystery which is at the heart of the Church's life. The demands of the Second Vatican Council in its liturgical constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* have been largely disregarded, if not contradicted. Only the principle of the active participation of the faithful is remembered, albeit misunderstood, while the concrete indications that would have prevented the current drift and allowed the Latin Church to have a liturgy worthy of the name have been forgotten. What has happened during this pontificate, with a vehemence similar to that of the seventies and eighties, is the systematic persecution, sometimes overt, sometimes subtle, of everything associated with the Roman liturgical tradition: the gestures of the priest, well-cared for vestments and sacred vessels, Gregorian chant and liturgical music, the Latin language; it is increasingly rare to take part in liturgies that have preserved these constituent elements.

Since the Motu Proprio Traditionis Custodes (16 July 2021), we have witnessed an incomprehensible and unjustifiable persecution of the faithful and priests who are attached to the ancient rite and are in full communion with the Church. This action reveals a dangerous ideological blindness that has provoked many of the faithful, who have felt unjustly compelled to make choices that break with ecclesial communion. The balance and détente that were gradually achieved with the *Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum* have been destroyed in an instant by an unnecessary, counterproductive and deeply unjust measure. To consider that the faithful who participate in the ancient

rite are ipso facto elements of the rupture of ecclesial communion, and therefore to proceed with the systematic and widespread eradication of Masses in the ancient rite, even in places where the bishops have not expressed any problems regarding ecclesial communion, is the expression of a one-sided, ideological, and therefore erroneous vision; if this principle were applied universally, it would probably also be necessary to abolish most Eucharistic celebrations in the reformed rite.

It is not only a question of depriving numerous priests, religious and lay faithful of a liturgical form to which they are particularly attached because of its particular characteristics, but also of abruptly interrupting the necessary process of internal reconciliation within the Church, which Benedict XVI has called for, and which passes precisely through the Church's recognition of the "rite of yesterday" as a gift. Traditionis Custodes has caused a painful internal rupture within the Catholic world and has also renewed an unthinkable rupture between the past and the present of the Church. This failure to achieve reconciliation ad intra undermines the foundations of the healthy and constructive ecumenical dialogue that the Catholic Church is painstakingly building ad extra, especially with Eastern and Orthodox Christians, who certainly do not see the treatment reserved by the Catholic authorities for the faithful attached to the oldest form of the Roman rite as a good sign.

The new pontificate will have the urgent task of resuming this internal reunion, which will require not only a more generous authorisation of liturgical and sacramental life according to the liturgical books of the ancient rite, but also a greater structuring that will allow the faithful and priests not to be constantly at the mercy of the fluctuations of ideological currents. The solution of a "traditional ordinariate", which would coordinate the various groups linked to the ancient form of the Roman rite, with a Bishop who could be the direct interlocutor of the other Brothers in the Episcopate in all matters concerning the management of the groups, seems the most logical, peaceful and respectful of reality.

Even more urgent is the need for a substantial intervention to combat the excessive "worldliness" in the celebration of the rite reformed by Paul VI. The resumption of the systematic application of the Instruction Redemptionis Sacramentum could be the first step towards reducing not only serious liturgical abuses, but also the now widespread "casual" use of the Missal and its rubrics. Particular attention must be paid to liturgical singing and music; the present situation allows us to say, without exaggeration, that the Church, in her Latin Rite, in fact no longer has her own singing, disregarding the clear indications of Sacrosanctum Concilium. Everywhere we hear

songs with clearly secular melodies, texts that are not biblical or at least not rooted in the liturgical tradition of the Church, and performances that are often improvised and approximate. The approved liturgical books (Graduale Triplex, Graduale Romanum), the result of a great effort to recover the Gregorian Proper, must once again become the fundamental reference point for liturgical singing.

We must not make the mistake of forgetting how much the care of the

Church's public worship is an extraordinary instrument of evangelisation,

allowing the faithful to experience "through the senses" the presence of the pacifying and sanctifying divine Majesty, which alone can enable us to live in this valley of exile with our eyes and hearts constantly lifted up to the Lord, comforted by His saving presence and protected from the inexorable process of secularisation. The "clericalisation of worship" will not be resolved by an unlimited expansion of lay ministries and a misunderstanding of the active participation of the faithful, but by removing the rites from manipulation, experimentation and arbitrary adaptation by bishops and priests, no less than by individual groups.