

LIVING THE EUCHARISTIC MYSTERY

(Homily at the Closing Solemn Mass of the
FABC IX Plenary Assembly in Manila, 16 August 2009)

We give thanks and praise to God that for these past six days, we in this Plenary Assembly of the FABC, have done our best to hold “steadily to the Apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers” (Acts 2:42). At this Eucharistic Sacrifice, we beg God to accept our efforts, to bless them, to correct what needs to be modified, to fructify what has been well done, and to bring us all home ready to live and share what we have received.

May I single out five elements from the many and rich contents of this ecclesial event:

- Eucharistic faith and reverence
- Ars celebrandi
- Word of God and Eucharist
- Eucharistic celebration and Inculturation
- The role of the Bishop.

1. Eucharistic Faith and Reverence

In the Gospel of this 20th Sunday in the Year, Jesus tells us: “I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever... For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in Him” (Jn 6:51, 55, 56).

The discussions and prayers of this past week have helped to strengthen us in our Catholic faith in the Real Presence. In the most Blessed Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, “the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, our Lord Jesus Christ and therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really and substantially contained” (*Council of Trent*, DS 1651; cf. CCC, 1374).

“That in this sacrament are the true Body of Christ and his true Blood is something that cannot be apprehended by the senses,” says St. Thomas, “but only by faith which relies on divine authority” (*S. Th.* III, 75, 1: cf. Paul VI: *Mysterium*)

“Sight, touch and taste in you are each deceived;
The ear alone most safely is believed:
I believe all the Son of God has spoken,
Than Truth’s own word there is no true token.”
(Adoro Te Devote)

This faith demands the surrender of our will, the sacrifice needed in order to believe or not to trust in the sense. Freed from doubt and pride, we are made free for the light of faith. We are ready to adore. “Adoration is the first attitude of man acknowledging that he is a creature before his Creator. It exalts the greatness of the Lord who made us and the almighty power of the Saviour who sets us free from evil. Adoration is homage of the spirit to the ‘King of Glory’ (Ps. 24:9-10), respectful silence in the presence of the ever greater God. Adoration of the thrice-holy and sovereign God of Love blends with humility and gives assurance to our supplications” (CCC, 2628). “The Catholic Church has always offered and still offers to the Sacrament of the Eucharist the cult of adoration, not only during Mass, but also outside of it, reserving the consecrated Hosts with the utmost care, exposing them to the solemn veneration of the faithful, and

carrying them in procession” (Paul VI: *Mysterium Fidei*, 56). Eucharistic Adoration Chapels extolled by many participants.

Adoration manifests itself in such gestures in genuflection, deep bow, kneeling, prostration and silence in the presence of the Lord. Asian cultures have a deep sense of the sacred and transcendent. Reverence in Asia to civil authorities sometimes shows itself in clasped hands, kneeling, bows, prostration and walking away while facing a dignitary. It should not be too difficult to bring and elevate this cultural value to honour our Eucharistic Jesus. The fashion in some parts of the world of not installing kneelers in churches should not be copied by the Church in Asia. The Holy Eucharist is the summit of the sacred in our worship.

2. Ars Celebrandi

Faith, adoration and reverence lead on to the correct *ars celebrandi*. The 2005 Synod of Bishops on the Holy Eucharist dwelt much on this. The *ars celebrandi* is the art of proper celebration. It is a fruit of faithful adherence to liturgical norms in all their richness and assistants. When the Eucharistic celebration is properly carried out, it manifests the Eucharistic faith of the Church; it nourishes the faith of the participants; and it sends them home on fire to live and share the faith.

The Bishop is the celebrant *par excellence* (cf. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 39). He must be “determined that the priests, the deacons, and the lay Christian faithful grasp ever more deeply the genuine meaning of the rites and liturgical texts and thereby be led to an active and fruitful celebration of the Eucharist” (GIRM, 22). Cathedral celebrations should be a model for a whole diocese (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 41-42).

Beginning with the clergy, there should be growing appreciation of the richness of liturgical signs, texts, Scripture readings, music, vestments and colours, gestures and silence. New Church buildings should clearly show the sanctuary, the altar and the tabernacle, but also the crucifix at the centre as far as possible, the celebrant’s chair and ambo.

The way in which Holy Communion is distributed should be clearly indicated and monitored and individual idiosyncracies should not be allowed. In the Latin Rite, only concelebrating priests take Holy Communion. Everyone else is given, be the person cleric or lay. It is not right that the priest discard any of the vestments just because the climate is hot or humid. If necessary, the Bishop can arrange the use of lighter cloth. It is altogether unacceptable that the celebrant will opt for local dress in the place of universally approved Mass vestments, or use baskets, or wine glasses to distribute the Holy Eucharist. This is inculturation wrongly understood.

As Pope John Paul II recalls, liturgical norms “are a concrete expression of the authentically ecclesial nature of the Eucharist; this is their deepest meaning. Liturgy is never anyone’s private property, be it of the celebrant or of the community in which the mysteries are celebrated” (*Eccl. De Euch.*, 52). The representatives of 19 Bishops’ conferences of Asia who met in Colombo in September 2008 under the auspices of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, in paragraph 14 of its September 2008 statement, insisted on the observation of liturgical norms and on the importance of liturgical formation for all categories in the Church.

3. Word of God and Eucharist

This FABC assembly appreciates the important place which the Word of God has in the Eucharistic Celebration. The last Synod of Bishops celebrated in October 2008 understandably gave much attention to this. Its Proposition 14 focuses particularly on the Word of God in the Liturgical celebration.

The Eucharistic assembly is the people of God convoked by the Holy Spirit to listen to the Word of God proclaimed and to celebrate the memorial of Christ's passion, death and resurrection. The Mass is the most privileged place where the Word of God is proclaimed, explained, listened to and adopted as a guide to life.

It is therefore clear why the Synod gave clear directives and indications for actions. There should be a place of honor reserved to the Bible in the church building. The Lectionary and especially the Gospel Book are to be dignified in size and shape. The latter is carried in solemn procession. Readers are to be well trained. The microphone and acoustics need attention. The homily is to be based principally on the Holy Scripture. Moments of silence, for reflection and personal prayer, are to follow the readings. Good translations of the Bible are to be promoted by the Bishops' Conference and the Lectionary needs *recognitio* from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

It is the tradition of the Church that during the Mass the readings are taken only from Holy Scriptures. Not even the writings of the Saints or Founders of Religious Orders are admitted. It is clear that the books of other religions are excluded, no matter how inspiring a particular text may be.

4. Eucharistic Celebration and Inculturation

The Second Vatican calls for healthy inculturation also in matters liturgical. "Even in the liturgy, the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or the good of the whole community. Rather, she respects and fosters the spiritual adornments and gift of the various races and peoples" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 37).

Asian cultures have many values highlighted in our discussions in the past six days; such as a sense of the sacred and the transcendent, contemplation, mysticism, silence, a sense of living traditions and organic development and gestures and postures which enhance celebration. The Colombo Liturgical Convention of September 2008 already mentioned gives importance to this question in paragraphs 1 to 6 of his final statement.

Liturgical inculturation is demanding. The Bishops' Conference of the country in question has first to set up a multi-disciplinary study committee of theologians, liturgists, biblical scholars, musicians, ethnologists and experts in literature, which ponders over a cultural question indicated by the bishops and eventually makes a recommendation to the Bishops' Conference. After adequate study of the document, the Bishops see if they can gather at least two-thirds of their votes in favor. If the outcome is positive, the Bishops bring the entire matter with their proposals to the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. Only when this Congregation gives its *recognitio* may the cultural element in question be introduced into sacred worship.

The major Church documents that give directives on how inculturation is to be made are *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 37-40, the 1994 *Instruction: Roman Liturgy and Inculturation*, and Chapter IX of *the General Instruction on the Roman Missal*.

If these directives are followed, the local Church will be spared questionable or downright mistaken innovations and idiosyncracies of some enthusiastic cleric whose fertile imaginations invents something on Saturday night and whose uninformed zeal forces this innovation on the innocent congregation on Sunday morning.

Dance in particular needs to be critically examined because most dances draw attention to the performers and offer enjoyment.

People come to Mass, not for recreation but, to adore God, to praise and thank him, to ask pardon for their sins, and to request other spiritual and temporal needs. The monasteries may be of help in how graceful body movements can become prayer. The Colombo statement quoted above remarks: "When pastoral zeal combines with cultural and religious sensitivity, new ground is broken. On the contrary, hasty and un-reflected changes weaken or damage the religious significance and life-transforming power of worship" (*Colombo Statement*, 6).

5. The Role of the Diocesan Bishop

The Diocesan Bishops, says the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, is the "the chief steward of the mysteries of God in the particular church entrusted to his care; he is the moderator, promoter and guardian of the whole of its liturgical life" (GIRM, 22 cf. also *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 41; *Redemptoris Sacramentum*, 19-25). The Colombo Liturgical Convention of September 2008 insists that local Ordinaries and National Conferences of Bishops should carefully ensure the proper observance of liturgical norms, and that Bishops are responsible for the liturgy celebrated in their dioceses, including those held in the house of religious men and women, ashrams and religious movements. (cf. *Colombo Statement*, 13)

To carry out this important and sacred ecclesial trust, Bishops will find help in Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, if the members of such commissions love the Church and are well informed on her liturgical books and norms. Since many liturgical abuses are based on ignorance rather than bad will (cf. *Redemptoris Sacramentum*, 7.9), it is clear that on-going courses on liturgical information are important and helpful (cf. *Colombo Statement*, 13, 14, 15).

May God guide, bless and reward all FABC Bishops for their promotion of the Sacred Liturgy, especially Eucharistic celebration and veneration.

Venerable brothers, as we conclude this IX Plenary Assembly of the FABC, we kneel in adoration, praise and supplication before our Eucharistic Jesus. May the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, "woman of the Eucharist" (*Eccl. de Euch.*, 53) intercede for us, for all dioceses in Asia, and the FABC, that we may all grow in the knowledge and love of the ineffable mystery of the Holy Eucharist, live this mystery with increasing commitment each day, and share it with our brothers and sisters with faith undaunted and joy untarnished.

+Francis Cardinal Arinze
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