



Lay Guardians of the Sacred Liturgy Without Borders

KNOWLEDGE COURAGE ACTION

LITURGICAL LITERACY PROGRAM (LLP)

MODULE 1V



Why is it Important to Celebrate the Liturgy According to Rules and Norms?

Initially, before I learned about the liturgy, I had the same attitude that probably most of the clergy, the religious and the general Christian faithful have. I am a cradle Catholic who developed the discipline and practice of coming to Mass every Sunday as my parents have taught me, following every gesture, saying the responses and singing the hymns as everyone in the congregation did.

What is the big deal about celebrating the Mass according to text and rubrics? What is wrong with changing, adding or removing some words of the Mass, deleting some prayers here and

there or changing or introducing some gestures in the Mass or more? But my attitude changed after studying the liturgy.

Why should the liturgy be celebrated in a particular way? Based on my study and research, I have come up with three categories of reasons why the liturgy must be celebrated according to prescribed liturgical laws and norms. These are theological, judicial, and moral reasons.

Theological

First of all, the sacred liturgy, the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, was instituted by no less than Christ himself at the Last Supper while he and his twelve apostles were celebrating the Passover which was instituted by no less than God himself. In the Last Supper, he foreshadowed his crucifixion and death on the cross by offering himself, Body and Blood, as the sacrificial lamb in place of the old covenant's sacrificial lamb or sheep taken from the flock of the Israelites.

The sacred liturgy therefore is the sacrament of salvation. When we celebrate the Holy Eucharist, the Presider call on the Holy Spirit to come upon the bread and wine, thereupon, the earthly species of the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ.

The Sacrament of the Eucharist *“is too great for anyone to permit himself to treat it according to his own whim, so that its sacredness and its universal ordering would be obscured”*. Anyone, be it a priest, who indulges in his own desire to do whatever he pleases with the liturgy *“injures the substantial unity of the Roman Rite, which ought to be vigorously preserved”*. Such actions do not *“serve authentic pastoral care or proper liturgical renewal”* but rather *“deprive Christ’s faithful of their patrimony and their heritage.”* Indiscriminate actions that do not conform with the rubrics and instructions are not consistent with the purposes of the reforms, rather are *“detrimental to the right of Christ’s faithful to a liturgical celebration that is an expression of the Church’s life in accordance with her tradition and discipline”*. These blithe impromptu improvisations cause *“distortion and disharmony”* in the sacred nature and essence of the Eucharistic celebration. The inevitable consequence is *“uncertainty in matters of doctrine, perplexity and scandal on the part of the People of God”* that has the potential of sowing

confusion and anguish in Christ's faithful especially at the present time when "*secularization*" is adding to the uncertainties of Christian life.¹

Liturgical celebrations that do not conform to the norms "*contribute to the obscuring of the Catholic faith and doctrine concerning this wonderful sacrament*". For "*the liturgical prayers, orations and songs are pervaded by the inspiration and impulse*" of the Sacred Scriptures themselves, "*and it is from these that the actions and signs receive their meaning*". As for the visible signs "*which the Sacred Liturgy uses in order to signify the invisible divine realities, they have been chosen by Christ or by the Church*". Furthermore, "*the structures and forms of the sacred celebrations according to each of the Rites of both East and West are in harmony with the practice of the universal Church ... which were received universally from apostolic and unbroken tradition*". For these reasons, "*it is the Church's task to transmit faithfully and carefully to future generations*" these elements of the liturgy which are "*wisely safeguarded and protected by the liturgical norms.*"²

Not even the Church has the power to alter "*things which were established by Christ himself and which constitute an unchangeable part of the Liturgy*". To do otherwise would not benefit the faithful but would do them grave harm. "*For the Sacred Liturgy is quite intimately connected with principles of doctrine, so that the use of unapproved texts and rites necessarily leads either to the attenuation or to the disappearance of that necessary link between the lex orandi and the lex credendi.*"³

Judicial

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) decreed that it is "*sinful to omit approved and received liturgical rites*". This edict has not changed. It is now entrenched in the legislation of the Church under *Sacrosanctum Concilium* art 22.3 and the 1983 Code of Canon Law can 846.1 which

¹ Congregation for Divine Worship, *Instruction Redemptionis Sacramentum*, par 11.

² Congregation for Divine Worship, *Instruction Redemptionis Sacramentum*, pars 6 and 9

³ Congregation for Divine Worship, *Instruction Redemptionis Sacramentum*, par 10.

stipulate that “no one, not even a priest, may add, remove or change anything in the liturgy on his own authority”.

The Church regards any breach of liturgical rules and norms (law) as liturgical abuse. In the juridical document, *Instruction Redemptionis Sacramentum*, the Church treats liturgical abuse as *delicta* or crime which has three grades of gravity that attract canonical sanctions and penalties under the Code. Therefore, a priest who celebrates the liturgy under his own terms outside of the prescribed texts and rubrics contravenes liturgical laws and commits liturgical abuse, a *delicta* (crime) that attracts “canonical penalties.”⁴

Moral

The moral reason is hinged on *ipso facto* the ordained ministry of priesthood, the sacrament of Holy Orders. The Code of Canon Law can 904 and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI stated in *Sacramentum Caritatis* that the “principal function” of the ordained ministry of priesthood is the celebration of the liturgy. In this duty, priests are expected to conform themselves to Christ in full responsible obedience to the Holy Father, their own bishops and other superiors. This obedience, a pledge that priests make in their ordination, is manifested in their obedience to the doctrines, Magisterium, Scripture and Tradition which are the sources of our faith in the Triune God. The liturgy, in the form that it is today, is rich in that deposit of faith such that it demands the reverence and acquiescence that it deserves from the clergy as the liturgy is an expression and manifestation of *lex orandi*, *lex credendi* and thus *lex vivendi*.

Furthermore, when a priest celebrates the Mass, he is not celebrating it in his own right but in the person of Jesus, *in persona Christi*. When he is standing in the sanctuary behind the altar, he ceases to be Fr so and so, but the *alter Christus* and the actions he performs in the Mass is *actio Christi*, the action of Christ. What right has a priest have in overriding the person of Christ and the actions of Christ.

⁴ Congregation for Divine Worship, *Instruction Redemptionis Sacramentum*, Chapter VIII.

Hence, the inappropriate and illicit practice of priests in indiscriminately changing, adding or omitting texts or gestures in the liturgy that they are supposed to pronounce and uphold must cease lest it distorts the authentic meaning of the Liturgy and renders it unstable.

For the LAY people in the pews, we, too, have a moral duty and bounden obligation to call out any impropriety (abuse) in liturgical celebrations, irreverence or distortion of the Holy Eucharist, and to stop liturgical abuse. The Universal Church made this clear in the juridical document *Instruction Redemptionis Sacramentum*. To wit:

[183.] In an altogether particular manner, let everyone do all that is in their power to ensure that the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist will be protected from any and every irreverence or distortion and that all abuses be thoroughly corrected. This is a most serious duty incumbent upon each and every one, and all are bound to carry it out without any favouritism. (emphasis supplied)

[184.] Any Catholic, whether Priest or Deacon or lay member of Christ's faithful, has the right to lodge a complaint regarding a liturgical abuse to the diocesan Bishop or the competent Ordinary equivalent to him in law, or to the Apostolic See on account of the primacy of the Roman Pontiff. It is fitting, however, insofar as possible, that the report or complaint be submitted first to the diocesan Bishop. This is naturally to be done in truth and charity. (emphasis supplied)

The source of the moral duty and bounden obligation of the Lay Guardians is found in The Old Testament book of the prophet Ezekiel 33:7-9 and Matthew 18:15-17. This is called the “Fraternal Correction” obligation which you can read in Module II of the Liturgical Literacy Program on the Lay Guardians website at www.layguardiansofthesacredliturgy.net.