

Liturgical Formation in Seminaries Today

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I am honored to be able to speak on a topic with which I have been intimately involved for 29 years; a seminary formator for the first 12 years and liturgy professor these past years. I am often asked, “What are you teaching those guys in the seminary?” So, in a way, this is an *apologia pro vita mea*.

As we often do, and should do, I begin with the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 16-17. I tell my students that this is why they must be in my class!

The study of liturgy is to be ranked among the compulsory and major courses in seminaries...it is to be taught under its theological, historical, spiritual, pastoral, and canonical aspects. Other professors...will bring out the connection between their subjects and the liturgy.

In seminaries and houses of religious, clerics shall be given a liturgical formation in their spiritual life. The means for this are: proper guidance so that they may be able to understand the sacred rites and take part in them wholeheartedly...***they must learn how to observe the liturgical laws.***

These texts speak to the new method of liturgical teaching. No longer just rubrics, but the greater picture of history, theology and pastoral application. But perhaps the most significant passage is the last one. How do we teach seminarians to properly observe the liturgical laws? How do we prevent a sort of liturgical fundamentalism and even a cafeteria catholic concept of just picking and choosing what one wants?

I begin with a great quote from St. Paul from I Corinthians 10:23. “All things are lawful, but not all are profitable.” Sympherei means to bring together or to be profitable. Some translations use advantageous or useful.

Yes, there are many things one can lawfully do, but are those choices good for the people of God? We need to ask if some of our decisions are helpful for the people of God to worship the Lord.

My favorite quote from the GIRM, 352, echoes the concern that the needs and prayer traditions of the people must come first rather than the priest's particular tastes.

Hence in arranging the celebration of Mass, the PRIEST SHOULD BE ATTENTIVE RATHER TO THE COMMON SPIRITUAL GOOD OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD THAN TO HIS OWN INCLINATIONS.

Some issues of seminarians today

Most have no history. Some think we Vatican II folks have ruined the church! Many think they should be able to know enough of what they need just from their experience. Most do not read. They go online with little direction. Some do not take correction well.

So how do we proceed? We must deconstruct in order to reconstruct; that is, we must first undo some of their ways of thinking in hopes that they will think with the Church and the liturgical reforms.

My method

A lot of history. A lot of pastoral examples. A proper study of the important texts. Emphasize the importance of inculturation. Emphasize the importance of ecclesiology. And finally the central idea of priestly service as opposed to any sense of a new clericalism.

Clericalism—Pope Francis

His most famous image is that priests should smell like their sheep. In his Letter to the People of God, August 20, 2018 he connects clericalism with a general abuse of power.

“Whenever we have tried to replace, or silence, or ignore, or reduce the People of God to small elites, we end up creating communities, projects, theological approaches, spiritualities and structures without

roots, without memory, without faces, without bodies and ultimately, without lives.”

This idea that we can deform the very people of God by a clerical, dictatorial attitude is quite sobering.

One major concern is not understanding “in persona Christi capitis” as balanced with “in persona ecclesiae”. This is made philosophically problematic with the use of “ontological change” to refer to the character of priestly ordination. “Ontological” was used for the Eucharist in Paul VI’s Encyclical “Mysterium Fidei” (1965). It is better to speak of being *reconfigured in Christ*, the character of baptism, confirmation and orders.

Likewise there seems to be an issue of identity. Thus the desire to be seen as special, special vestments, use of traditional forms to be unique. These actually put a wall between priests and the people we are called to serve. These also can seem to be issues of control.

Most disheartening is a sense among some seminarians and young priests who think that the people of God are taking advantage of God’s mercy and our kindness. They think we must protect the Church and even God’s mercy!

Mark Francis deals with these issues in the Amen Corner of the July 2019 issue of Worship “Reflections on Clericalism and the Liturgy”. He states: “While mandated by the Church to preside at the Eucharist, the priest never ceases to be part of the people of God—and he forgets this at his peril.”

This emphasizes the role of the assembly. He further writes: “Not respecting the various ministerial roles during the celebration is an all too frequent occurrence in some parishes that renders the assembly a passive “consumer’ of worship.”

It seems that the idea of the centrality of the offering of the faithful has been diminished again or even forgotten. One of my favorite passages from the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, and repeated in the GIRM, is that the offering of the people is an essential part of the

sacrifice of the Eucharist. It is not new as both *Mystici Corporis* and *Mediator Dei* state it. Here is SC 48.

Christ's faithful...should not be strangers or silent spectators. They should be instructed by God's word and be nourished at the table of the Lord's Body, they should give thanks to God, ***by offering the immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn to offer themselves as well.***

To accept that the People of God have an essential role in the offering of the sacrifice does not diminish the role of the ordained priest.

Three particular issues

The use of only the antiphons at mass.

This is a misreading of GIRM 48 which states:

In the Dioceses of the United States of America there are four **options** for the Entrance Chant: (1) the antiphon from the Missal; (2) the antiphon and Psalm of the Graduale Simplex for the liturgical time; (3) a chant from another collection of Psalms and antiphons, including Psalms arranged in responsorial or metrical forms; (4) another liturgical chant.

Some want to teach that these are listed in terms of priority, that the antiphon in the missal is primary, and even if a hymn is used, the antiphon is also to be sung. Remember the GIRM states that these are options. There is no desire for the duplication of these options.

Extraordinary Form

Summorum Pontificum July 7, 2007

Art. 5, §1 In parishes where ***a group of the faithful*** attached to the previous liturgical tradition ***stably exists***, the parish priest should willingly accede to their requests to celebrate Holy Mass according to the rite of the 1962 Roman Missal. He should ensure that the good of

these members of the faithful is *harmonized with the ordinary pastoral care of the parish*, under the governance of the bishop in accordance with Canon 392, *avoiding discord and favoring the unity of the whole Church*.

Remember it states that the people must request it and they need to be a stable, even sizable group. There is no desire to celebrate the extraordinary form and folks drive from all over the diocese. Plus, unity is still the primary goal of any parish.

Ad Orientem

There is a new desire for mass ad orientem. Benedict XVI was desirous of this, finally wanting a crucifix on the altar to represent our looking East and the transcendent.

But mass celebrated facing the people was promulgated in the document *Inter Oecumenici*, on the orderly carrying out of the Constitution on the Liturgy, September 26, 1964 which states in 91.

The main altar should be preferably free standing, to permit walking around it and celebration facing the people. Its location in the place of worship *should be truly central* so that the attention of the whole congregation naturally focuses there.

The issue is not facing East but the centrality of the altar which is obscured by the priest standing between altar and people.

The GIRM 299 in 2002 made it stronger.

“The altar should be built separate from the wall, in such a way that it is possible to walk around it easily and that Mass can be celebrated at it facing the people, *which is desirable wherever possible.*”

Any personal wish to celebrate ad orientem seems actually to place much attention on the priest and his back than to the centrality of the altar of sacrifice.

Only good formation will give a solid basis to good liturgy.