

**OPENING ADDRESS**  
**FATHER TOM RANZINO**  
**2017 National Meeting of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions**

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I welcome you to the forty-eighth annual meeting of the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions. Our sincere thanks to Region 8 and the Archdiocese of St Paul and Minneapolis for their warm welcome and for creating this time to consider the *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Touching the Hem of His Garment*. We are privileged to consider this topic and this ritual – in it we examine the reality of human sickness and the work of God’s grace and healing through and with the medical arts.

Faithful to our Catholic Tradition we believe God’s grace is at work in sickness and in health in human life. During these days together our belief in the Divine Physician will intersect with the human longing for cures. This belief will shape and nuance our conversations by drawing upon our personal experience of carrying in our own bodies the dying of the Lord so that ours may be the gift of His life.

To the many dioceses who suffered catastrophic damage from Hurricanes Harvey and Irma and Jose; to the dioceses who have been contending with deadly fires that have altered the landscape and lives of your people: God's mercy be shown to you so that you do not lose hope.

The Federation is deeply grateful to the Bishop's Committee on Divine Worship. In our unique partnership, our primary task is to advise the Bishops of our country on matters liturgical. We respect the trust that our Bishops have placed in us. We bring energy for the common work we share: to explore the enactment of the art of ritual; to be collaborators in clarifying the vision of Catholic worship in the Dioceses of the United States; and to collegially carry forward the principles of Catholic worship as given in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*.

And in that great effort, we remember that suffering and illness have always been among the greatest problems that plague the human spirit. Suffering is a mystery. Our approaches to dealing with this reality do not always provide a neat solution because the causes and purposes of suffering often lie beyond

rational understanding. The believer searches for deeper meaning into this mystery. We begin with what we know: the link between illness and salvation, and our belief that Christ's Gospel is shown in his healing touch. This is true hope for the life of the world.

This gathering is our fourth under the extraordinarily competent leadership of Mrs. Rita Thiron, Executive Director, as well as the governance of a restructured Board of Directors. This year the Board experienced a great many new faces around the table which adds to the dynamism of the regional experience of Catholic worship. The Board turnover also creates challenges. Four years ago the Board was restructured to best serve the Federation. To that end, the Board concluded that its primary work was to hold in trust the Mission of the Federation for the sake of the membership. It is a Board which governs, not micromanages. The Federation entrusts the day to day work to Rita Thiron, and we tell her to go until we say “stop,” not stop until we say “go.” Rita is equipped with a deep background in both academic and pastoral liturgy, plus executive skills which move the Federation forward as the trusted name in Catholic worship. Rita serves us well.

While each of the representatives of the 14 regions who comprise the Board of Directors has his or her own preoccupations with their own Bishops and diocesan duties, the Board seeks to be consistent in looking broadly, acting collaboratively and thinking wisely for the good the Federation. I am so grateful to each of the Board members for imparting their expertise and the gift of their time to the Federation.

So, let's keep our eyes on what is the Federations' purpose when we are not gathered in person, as we are at this in national meeting:

### **WHAT ARE WE DOING?**

The work of the Federation is simple. We are to promote the liturgy as the heart of Christian life, especially in the parish community. This is our target; this is what we do in the following ways:

- 1. We promote and coordinate the interconnectivity of Diocesan liturgical personnel.** A sometime overlooked asset in belonging to the Federation is the network created within the 14 regions of professional and volunteer colleagues

who share their hard creative work, who collaborate and who inform. In our home dioceses we don't have to recreate the liturgical wheel knowing that our colleagues may have already done good work which we can adapt for use in our own local dioceses.

**2. We are about liturgical formation guided by the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.** While the Federation is not a publishing house, we do produce practical materials, faithful to the principles of the liturgy which are useful in training. These materials can be hard copy or virtual. We can also offer well-trained liturgical personnel who are willing to teach and mentor beyond their own diocese for the greater good. In doing so, the Federation has to meet the challenge of being creative, accessible and collaborative all year long.

**3. We are to work collaboratively with the BCDW on matters proposed by the USCCB.** Understood correctly, this means our mission as a Federation is based on handling relationships well: the relationship between the Executive Director and the Board of Directors; the relationships between the member dioceses of each region; the relationships between the Federation members and their Bishops; the relationships the Federation has with other organizations who work in the field of liturgy; the relationship the Federation has with the BCDW. Within each of these relationships compassion and respect are demanded. It is true that within the Federation may not agree on every "thing" on the agenda; however, we can find common ground in acceptance and compassion for what is. Respectfully remaining faithful to the principles of the *Constitution* as well as best practices in the field means the Federation has something to contribute to both conversation about and the doing of the liturgy in the United States. It is the responsibility of service to say what the Federation has to contribute *out loud*. We must deal with what is. However, instead of criticizing, we want to find common ground and do what we do best for the sake of the Church.

**4. We are the one national organization with a unique history within the Church through which diocesan liturgical personnel can contribute effectively and responsibly articulating the voice of the laity, the clergy and the religious in the promotion and development of the liturgical arts.**

As many veterans of the Federation can well remember, in years past the National Meeting was often the time when liturgical issues were hotly debated,

producing outcomes that were at times difficult for the Federation to enact. I do not advocate a return to the days occupied by great battles. However, given the recent statements and insights by Pope Francis regarding the liturgy-- are there not liturgical issues that need re-examining? Need study? Need proactive conversation? We desire to inform the conversation, staying true to the Tradition of the Church. What do we have to contribute? What do we need to say out loud?

5. Yearly, this national meeting is co-hosted by the Federation, the BCDW and the local host diocese. We come here to meet and to work. Do not be a passive observer. Be active in attending the Committee meetings on Thursday; go to the Banquet, go to your Regional caucus. Help the Federation do our work.

#### WHAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE LAST OCTOBER???

1. A great deal of work has been spent by members of the Federation in creating the multi-platform/ formation opportunities for Spanish speaking Catholics to welcome the Misal Romano for use in the United States. I acknowledge Fr. James Burkhart as the Chair of the Misal Committee, along with Mrs. Rita Thiron and the members of the Task Force who have been creative and inclusive in taking the lead to serve the USCCB in this effort. The Federation welcomes this challenge and opportunity which will bear much fruit.
2. Collaborating closely with Liturgy Training Publications, the Federation has created the content of a virtual workshop series on the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults*. Using the sound pastoral and academic formation offered by the presenting Federation members as well as the excellent technical knowhow and production capabilities of LTP, each of these Workshops in the series have been well crafted and well received by participants from around the country. The possibility of reusing this series from the LTP Archives means that the Workshops will have a long life of use ahead.

3. The Board of Directors approved the 2018 Federation operating budget. While we are operating in the black, the Federation continues to operate on a very tight budget. Thanks to those member dioceses that have been faithful in paying your member dues; and thanks to the individuals who have contributed to the Annual Appeal. The Federation depends on these finances to support the Mission.

**AND SO FINALLY...**

*As once you walked through ancient streets  
and reached toward those in pain  
We know you come among us Lord  
with power to heal again. [sung]\**

We focus on the reality of evil in the presence of sickness; maladies affecting the mind, body and spirit. None of us can escape our bodily degeneration, and all of us look to be spared that part of life's journey. In diverse cultures, words continue to be said, rituals continue to be done to aid the medical arts in the hope that healing will come. Please God.

*You touch us through physicians' skills  
through nurses' gifts of care,  
And through the love of faithful friends  
who lift our lives in prayer...*

Words like these get said out loud : *Father, pray for my sister; the news is not good; pray for the family; do you think you could give me that prayer for the sick that you do?..... You know I wasn't expecting to feel this bad...sometimes I can't get my mind to shut off--it just keeps going dark on me---- I think I am ready... it's just that I don't want to leave her behind.....through this holy anointing.....* Sometimes, you and I live aware of illnesses striking at the right and at the left and then wondering when will the target be over me?

I myself have been anointed once in my life and what I remember the most was the shape of the cross on my forehead. The finger of that priest moved over my

forehead, over my hands- stressing the north/south-east/west lines converging on me. What does it mean to be touched in this way by an agent of God?

*Through nights of pain and wakefulness,  
through days when strength runs low,  
Grant us your gift of patience Lord,  
your calming peace to know*

So is it too much to ask of God, to find meaning in the waste of illness? Or perhaps, that's the point-- the Church rushes to the side of the one who is ill because God never said to you or me, *you ask too much*. I wonder what is God saying to me when the one I anoint with the Oil of the Sick is not cured?

Somewhere deep within me I know it's not only about curing, but about saving.

Mark Searle reminded us of this: "Life is not a straight line with only death at the end of it; but rather, life is a kind of spiral with ever deepening experiences of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ."

*We come to you, O Loving Lord,  
in our distress and pain,  
and trust that through our nights and days  
your grace will heal, sustain.*

Your grace will heal, sustain. Now we will go to examine how this mystery unfolds. Indeed this Sacrament is for the life of the world, as we hold in tension the lived realities of limits, sufferings, recovery and hope.

So welcome. Have a good week. Engage your colleagues, do the work, enter the prayer, expect to be surprised.

\*Lyrics from the hymn "We Come to You for Healing, Lord."

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Tune: LAND OF REST, CM American.