



*On October 1, 2025, Cardinal Arthur Roche, Prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments addressed the members of the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions. They had gathered in Baltimore, Maryland for their fifty-sixth annual national meeting. What follows is the text of his address.*

## ‘Interpreted by Love’

Liturgical Formation and Participation  
 in the light of *Desiderio Desideravi*

I am very pleased to be with you today and I hope that my being here will not only be a sign of my appreciation of all that you do in dioceses, parishes, academia and other institutions within the United States, but also a source of encouragement to continue your valuable work with confidence and with a sense always of deep joy in serving the Lord and assisting all who participate in the liturgy to constantly discover the awesomeness of what we celebrate.

As you know, I have been asked to talk to you about liturgical formation and have decided to do this, almost as a memorial lecture in recognition of the importance of Pope Francis’ Apostolic Letter, *Desiderio Desideravi*.<sup>i</sup> The title I have given to my address is ‘Interpreted by Love’, a line taken from a well-known hymn, “Dear Lord and Father of Mankind”, adapted by William Garrett Horder,<sup>ii</sup> an English Congregationalist, from a poem entitled “The Brewing of Soma” by an American Quaker poet, John Greenleaf Whittier.<sup>iii</sup> This seems to me to reflect well both the inspiration and concern with which Saint Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth and what we find also in the Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis, which crowns much of what he wrote throughout his pontificate concerning the need to rediscover the beauty of the liturgy.

Over 100 years ago, Romano Guardini intuited that:

“The liturgy is not about knowledge, but reality. It is true that there is a specific science, that is liturgical science, whose knowledge is implicit for understanding the meaning of the liturgical event...However the liturgy in itself is not pure knowledge, rather it is the fullness or reality, which, alongside knowing, also takes in much more: it is doing, ordering, being.”<sup>iv</sup>

Guardini was merely excavating something that underpinned the practice and pastoral solicitude of Saint Paul in his first letter to the Church in Corinth – a masterpiece of liturgical and pastoral theology

– where he speaks directly about the liturgy. This is, as you know, the oldest Scriptural text that we have on the Eucharist. Paul had founded the Church in Corinth and loved it dearly. However, after having worked hard to establish it, he was now receiving reports about certain enthusiasms, personal practices, creativities – ‘emotions of the hour’ – the excesses of style that were developing and taking root in the community and which were warping the Christian message and corrupting the celebration of the Eucharist with an overlay of fashionable interpretations and practices and attitudes and syncretistic elements that lacked a real love and care for the Church. He was, in fact, like Saint John the Evangelist much later, addressing the beginnings of Gnosticism long before it became more fashionable in the second century. Paul was calling upon the Corinthians to position themselves aright – to return to plumb center. What they had succumbed to was self-serving and a misinterpretation of the gospel. All human religions are of their nature gnostic – claiming to know and do things that others do not – they are elitist – and therefore of human but not divine origin.

The eleventh chapter in this first letter to the Corinthians begins boldly:

“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.”<sup>v</sup>

Paul is reminding them about how he formed them and he goes on to speak of the need to maintain an attitude of profound respect for the message and for what they have received through his apostolic teaching. The reports he had received regarding the Church’s public worship had been a cause of great alarm to him. And why? Let him speak for himself:

“[For] in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

“Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.”<sup>vi</sup>

It is clear that Paul, an Apostle, a Bishop with responsibility for this Church, wanted to underline the importance of unity in the community – not simply in one particular community or parish with its ‘own ideas’, but the unity of the entire community, the Church in whatever part of the world. This is the meaning of that last sentence I have already quoted, “*For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body [i.e., the Church] eats and drinks judgment on himself.*” Again, Guardini casts some light on this when he wrote:

“The Catholic liturgy is the supreme example of an objectively established rule of spiritual life ... therefore it will be the best teacher of the ‘*via ordinaria*’ – the regulation of the religious life in common.”<sup>vii</sup>

In line with Saint Paul’s letter to the newly founded Church of Corinth, the Successors of St Peter have also from time to time, like the Apostle, had occasion to write to the Church regarding the importance of valuing, in faithfulness to the Lord, what has been handed down to successive generations regarding respect for the celebration of the Liturgy as described by the Roman Rite.

Pope Francis’ Apostolic Letter, *Desiderio Desideravi*, is in line with this papal magisterium and is addressed to everyone in the Church throughout the world and underlines the need for good liturgical formation worldwide. While formation is often achieved through courses etc., the Pope called our attention to the fact that liturgical formation springs from the actual celebration of the liturgy itself. It goes without saying that a bad celebration of the sacred mysteries diminishes what is being celebrated, short-changing God’s people.

The opening words of Pope Francis’ Apostolic Letter immediately set a tone that is important to keep in mind when reading it, for by his opening words he places us in the fire of God’s love for us: *Desiderio desideravi hoc Pascha manducare* - “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Lk 22:15). Jesus opens the Last Supper with words that come from the depths of his heart, revealing to us from the depths of his inner self a desire that burns in him like a fire, like a burning passion. This one verse from Luke’s Gospel captures the entire contemplative life of the Church from the Last Supper to the return of the Lord. This is an important sentiment for us to keep in mind as we too enter into the sacred liturgy.

Pope Francis did not set out to give a systematic treatment of liturgical formation. What he was wishing to do was to take the Church by the hand and lead her toward the centre of the mystery we celebrate, towards the heart of Christ which burns with his ardent desire that we should draw nigh, take his Body and drink his Blood, to worship the Father with hearts and minds made new through having been washed in the blood of the Lamb. He says, “I simply desire to offer some prompts or cues for reflections that can aid in the contemplation of the beauty and truth of Christian celebration” (*DD* n. 1). This desire may seem modest, but the depth and breadth of his liturgical vision offers us countless opportunities to pause for reflection in order to appreciate the great gift that has been handed onto us in the liturgical books which form the unique *lex orandi* of the Roman Rite.

For me one of the most striking images, in what I term to be a Papal love letter to the Church and her liturgy, is in paragraph 14, which is worth listening to in full:

“As the Second Vatican Council reminds us (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 5), citing the Scriptures, the Fathers, and the Liturgy – the pillars of authentic Tradition – *it was from the side of Christ as He slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth ‘the wonderful sacrament of the whole church’*. The parallel between the first Adam and the new Adam is striking: just as from the side of the first Adam, after having put him into a deep sleep, God draws forth Eve, so also from the side of the new Adam,

sleeping the sleep of death on the Cross, there is born the new Eve, the Church. The astonishment for us lies in the words that we can imagine the new Adam made his own in gazing at the Church: 'Here at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh' (Genesis 2:23). This means that having believed in His Word and descended into the waters of Baptism, we have become bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh."



'Bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh!' What an astonishing statement, but that is what we are called to be. These sentiments come from the burning heart of the Holy Trinity which have been there ever since we thought of removing ourselves in the Garden of Eden from the communion of Trinitarian love, which in God's original plan was precisely the ultimate destination of our creation.

If we are to take sacramentality seriously, we need to begin with Christ's loving gaze upon his own body – his own flesh and blood, the Church – and to realise the depth of his loving desire for her. Just think of that for a moment. A liturgical formation or a celebration which is not grounded in the warmth and love of that gaze and that understanding will remain deficient. Technically proficient, perhaps, but blind to the face of the radiant sun who has come from on high to visit his people, as the Benedictus reminds us each morning. As the late Pope Benedict XVI noted, also repeated by Pope Francis: Christianity is not about coming to know a body of doctrine, but about coming to know and having a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is from that penetrating gaze of Christ, who looks at us and loves us (cf. Mk 10:21), that we can either go away sad like the rich young man in the gospel – denying our true identity and dignity, succumbing to the tempter's deception in the Garden of Eden – or we can rejoice at being recognised for who we are, and what we are still to be 'in his image and likeness', and so come before the Lord in worship, praise and adoration.

Love always seeks communion. When this was broken by our first parents it inflamed the Holy Trinity with an even greater desire to re-establish it, to bridge the distance that would be achieved through the self-giving of Jesus to us in the Passover. This supreme act of self-giving, in obedience to the Father, "even unto death on the Cross" (Ph 2.8), must also be matched by our willingness to receive him. This is the meaning of "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you." This "with you" is part of the very logic of his giving. If there is no "you" ready to receive, then what he offers can never be a gift. Our willingness to receive that gift of his Body and Blood, in love, is on the same level as the enormity of his self-giving. Without the 'with you' communion cannot be achieved. As Saint Paul says, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth in him." (Eph 1.7-10)

This gaze, then, of the crucified and risen Lord, which penetrates hearts, should awaken in us our own ability to gaze – enabling us to see Christ not only as our Lord, but also, through being 'bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh', our brother. This is, as the Pope points out, the source of our astonishment! We who have been washed, anointed, and fed are now become sons in the Son, (Gal 4.6; Rm 8.15) sharers

in the divine nature (cf. 2 Ptr 1:4), God's holy people. I believe it is from here that we can trace a proper, and well-grounded formation and which stems from our participation in the mysteries. Consider for a moment what Tertullian said about the very fleshiness of the sacraments of initiation:

“The flesh, indeed, is washed, in order that the soul may be cleansed; the flesh is anointed, that the soul may be consecrated; the flesh is signed (with the cross), that the soul too may be fortified; the flesh is shadowed with the imposition of hands, that the soul also may be illuminated by the Spirit; the flesh feeds on the body and blood of Christ, that the soul likewise may fatten on its God.”<sup>viii</sup>

In this treatise by Tertullian ‘On the Resurrection of the Flesh’, he uses the phrase *caro salutis cardo* – the flesh is the hinge of salvation.<sup>ix</sup> Our response to the Lord's loving gaze will depend on how immersed we are in the sacramentality of the signs we find in the liturgical action.

The idea of the Lord's look or gaze was something dear to Romano Guardini, who is cited numerous times in *Desiderio Desideravi*, and whom the Pope also cited elsewhere in his magisterial teachings.



In 1929, Guardini visited the great basilica of Monreale in Sicily. This will immediately conjure up for those of you who have visited Monreale a vision of breathtaking beauty as you enter this basilica. The stories of the Bible unfold in stunning mosaics around the walls, changing hue and character as the rays of the sun pass the course of the day. Presiding over all of this is the gaze of the *Christos Pantokrator*. To stand beneath this mighty majestic image is in some sense to know and to feel that you have been seen, and perhaps even seen through! But, for Guardini, it was when the liturgy was taking place that the basilica, in all its splendour, that it took on its full significance. He arrived there on Holy Thursday. The Mass was well in progress, and the holy oils were about to be blessed and consecrated. Guardini wrote:

“The ample space was crowded. Everywhere people were sitting in their places, silently watching. What should I say about the splendour of this place? At first, the visitor's glance sees a basilica of harmonious proportions. Then it perceives a movement within its structure, which is enriched with something new, a desire for transcendence that moves through it to the point of passing beyond it; but all of this culminates in that splendid luminosity...

“When they brought the holy oils to the sanctuary, and the procession, accompanied by the insistent melody of an ancient hymn wound through that throng of figures, the basilica sprang back to life. Its forms began to move... The crowd sat and watched. The women were wearing veils. The colours of their garments and shawls were waiting for the sun to make them shine again. The men's faces were distinguished and handsome. Almost no one was reading. All were living in the gaze, all engaged in contemplation. Then it became clear to me what the foundation of real liturgical piety is: the capacity to find the ‘sacred’ within the image and its dynamism.”<sup>x</sup>

Guardini paints an impressive scene as the great basilica comes alive during the celebration of the most sacred mysteries. Here we are at the core of how liturgical formation and participation comes about – being rapt within an action which is life changing in its dimensions, not just for the community which is gathered to praise God, but also for the whole world. This brings us neatly to the meaning of the word liturgy – a public work done on behalf of the people. Those present in Monreale, back in 1929, who had found the sacred in the dynamic symbols of the Holy Thursday liturgy were changed and become agents of change through living in the gaze.

Guardini, what is more, did not leave it at that. He went back to attend the Easter Vigil, which in those days was celebrated on the morning of Holy Saturday. He was taken by how the whole space of the great edifice was used for the various parts of the rite, all of which was highly impressive. But he then says, “The most beautiful thing was the people. [...] Almost no one was reading, almost no one stooped over in private prayer. Everyone was watching. The sacred ceremony lasted for more than four hours, but the participation was always lively.”<sup>xi</sup> Of course, we are listening to a written description from a time before the capturing of images on our mobile phones. However, how could we not but be impressed by the deep formative nature of the liturgy when it is allowed to speak for itself and when people are disposed to both give and receive.

To participate well – *fully, actively, consciously* – in the liturgy is to be involved in a process of deep on-going formation. The liturgy, as Pope Saint Paul VI described it is the “first school of the spiritual life.”<sup>xii</sup> Through its rhythms, its lapidary words, phrases, prayers, music, songs and gestures it chisels away at the roughhewn mass which is convoked Sunday after Sunday, and which gradually, almost imperceptibly forms and shapes them into God’s holy, priestly people who have been set apart to sing his praises. Dom Gregory Dix was to catch something of this in his work on the liturgy:

“Do this in Memory of Me! Was ever another command so obeyed? For century after century, spreading slowly to every continent and country and among every race on earth, this action has been done, in every conceivable human circumstance, for every conceivable human need from infancy and before it to extreme old age and after it, from the pinnacle of earthly greatness to the refuge of fugitives in the caves and dens of the earth. Men have found no better thing than this to do for kings at their crowning and for criminals going to the scaffold; ... furtively, by an exiled bishop who had hewn timber all day in a prison camp near Murmansk; gorgeously, for the canonisation of S. Joan of Arc ... And best of all, week by week and month by month, on a hundred thousand successive Sundays, faithfully, unfailingly, across all the parishes of Christendom, the pastors have done this just to [form and feed] the ‘plebs sancta Dei’ - the holy people of God. ...”<sup>xiii</sup> All of this, done, “in Memory of Me.”

As the Church raises its voice in response to being called to worship, to being gazed upon by her Head and Redeemer then the law of prayer, the *lex orandi*, and the law of belief, the *lex credendi*, expressed in the rites will assuredly also find form in the law of living, the *lex vivendi*, as the liturgy seeps into the very fabric of the life of our parishes, communities, and our wider society.

As Guardini was about to leave the cathedral in Monreale, he reflected that “There are different means of prayerful participation. One is realized by listening, speaking, gesturing. But the other takes place through watching. The first way is a good one, and we northern Europeans know no other. But we have lost something that was still there at Monreale: the capacity for living-in-the-gaze, for resting in the act of seeing, for welcoming the sacred in the form and event, by contemplating them.”<sup>xiv</sup> This is a concern which would stay with Guardini until the end of his life. We need but recall his famous letter to the Third Liturgical Congress in Mainz in 1964<sup>xv</sup> where he recalled his experience in Palermo and asked whether we moderns (now post-moderns) were even capable of the liturgical act. That letter returns to many of the master themes he had explored through his experience with the Liturgical Movement. Particularly for our purposes he comes back to the idea of participation.

This, of course, is a vexed question upon which much ink has been spilled. For some, active participation came to mean ever increasing busyness, a constant need for people to be “doing things” during the celebration. For others active participation was to be understood as an almost totally interior engagement with the rites and prayers with little thought for the corporate nature of Christian worship. Guardini eschews both of these extremes as he explores the true depths of participation. In doing so, I believe, we come to see that in reality we have only scratched the surface of both formation and participation.

In his extended essay “Liturgical Formation”, Guardini lays out in a masterly way the Christian teaching on the person being a union of body and soul. He says, “The centre of liturgical action, the one who prays, sacrifices and acts, is not the *soul*, not even *interiority*, but it is the *person*. The whole person carries liturgical action. The soul is certainly crucial, but insofar as she en-souls the body. Interiority, to be sure, is as well, but only as far as it is revealed through the body – *anima forma corporis*.”<sup>xvi</sup> This, then, has obvious consequences for participation in the liturgy. It becomes obvious also that when our liturgical celebrations do not respect this reality then they will fall short because they will not be engaging the *person*. They will either be so spiritual as to be of no earthly use, or be so corporeal as to be emptied of all transcendent meaning. Guardini unpacks what real participation is:

“We are not living a religion of pure interiority. The silent internal ‘word’, in which the first concept is formed, itself points to an embodiment. If it can unfold completely then it will become an external word, gesture, action, bodily being. It is revealed interiority: a depth filled with life, inner silence that has turned outwards.”<sup>xvii</sup>

I think that there you have what our formation and our participation should be aiming for: “revealed interiority” and “silence turned outwards”. To reach this place will require more than erudite courses, important as they will be in the overall picture. First and foremost, however, it requires that our liturgies are true schools of prayer where that inner word can be born and find expression in the signs, gestures, music and movements of the liturgy. At such a stage few explanations are needed, if any at all, as Christ’s body recognises that she is being gazed upon by her loving Lord.

But let us follow Guardini further into the realm of true participation. Reflecting on the fact that some religious attitudes concentrate only on the *spiritual* and *interior* dimension – such as wordless prayer

made in silence and in an interior openness to God - nevertheless, he continues: “The liturgy is different: in it, man in his wholeness is in the centre with all his actions and attitudes.”<sup>xviii</sup> If we were to just leave it at that some might say that people are being put at the centre of the liturgy instead of God. But Guardini has not finished. He goes on:

“At the height of his perfection, man is not supposed to lose his body; quite the opposite, he will become – in the truest sense of the word – ever more human.”<sup>xix</sup>

Here we can see Guardini reflecting on the eschatological hope that is ours as Christians. We profess belief ‘in the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come.’ Our ultimate perfection will be the *soma pneumatikon*, ‘the spiritual body’ of which Saint Paul speaks (cf. 1 Cor 15: 44). The liturgy leads us ever more towards this perfection, that is: “in the liturgical act [man’s] bodiliness strives always more toward interiority and spirituality, while his soul becomes continually more expressed in his body, becoming bodily in a certain sense.”<sup>xx</sup> If we grasp the depth of what he is getting at here then we must realise that to be truly formed by the liturgy is not only to understand the rites and gestures, it is to be transformed by them, to become more human by participating in the mystery of Christian worship. Guardini’s central point, has, I believe yet to be totally grasped. It eschews the simplistic and reductive either/or between internal and external participation leading us on to a more difficult but also more fulfilling path which embraces the Catholic position of both/and. He explains it in this way:

“This process has two layers of meaning: from the inside to the outside and from the outside to the inside. It signifies the internal in the external and allows the internal to be read externally. This means that the internal is given by the external and the alien internal is received by the external. It is a symbolic relation in a twofold direction: revealing and recognizing, giving and receiving.”<sup>xxi</sup>

In order to embrace the depth of such an understanding it is vital to rediscover the theological sense of the liturgy. This clearly is an important part of *Desiderio Desideravi*, where the Pope speaks of our debt to the Second Vatican Council and the liturgical movement for rediscovering this theological understanding. Therefore, when the Pope speaks about the liturgy, he is saying, “The Liturgy is God’s action with us, and we must be attentive to Him: to Him who speaks, to Him who acts, to Him who calls, to Him who sends... And this is not outside time and history, no, it is within historical reality, within situations.” (To participants of the “Shalom” Catholic community, 26 September 2022).

The theological understanding of the liturgy is the *sine qua non* in recovering the beauty of the truth of what Christian celebration is. It has been foundational from the earliest days of the Liturgical Movement as witnessed to by the words of one of its pioneers, Dom Lambert Beauduin OSB, who in 1909 wrote “*Knowledge of the liturgy must lead to a renewal of the spiritual life and thus to a renewal of the liturgical apostolate. There cannot be knowledge without these dimensions.*”<sup>xxii</sup> Quoting *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Pope Francis tells us: “the liturgy is the priesthood of Christ, revealed to us and given in his Paschal Mystery, rendered present and active by means of signs addressed to the senses (water, oil, bread, wine, gestures, words, music, song), so that the Spirit, plunging us into the Paschal Mystery, might transform every dimension of our life, conforming us more and more to Christ.” (DD n. 21).

And here we return to the world of symbols. To engage with the liturgy theologically we need to have an appreciation for the symbolic language it speaks. Again, the Pope addresses this in his Apostolic Letter by citing Guardini “Here there is outlined the first task of the work of liturgical formation: man must become once again capable of symbols” (*DD* n. 44). This was the great issue which occupied Guardini for most of his life and was expressed so well in his letter to the liturgical congress in Mainz. The Pope also shares this concern and writes beautifully and forcefully about the great need there is to become once more “capable” of symbols – starting with the symbol that is our own body. Without this understanding it becomes nigh impossible to appreciate Guardini’s view of participation and the formative and deeply human interplay between interiority and exteriority. The Pope laments the fact that “modern man has become illiterate, no longer able to read symbols” (*DD* n. 44) and then, as if echoing the master he had studied years before he says:

“Our body is a symbol because it is an intimate union of soul and body; it is the visibility of the spiritual soul in the corporeal order; and in this consists human uniqueness, the specificity of the person irreducible to any other form of living being. Our openness to the transcendent, to God, is constitutive of us. Not to recognize this leads us inevitably not only to not knowing God but also to not knowing ourselves.” (*DD* n. 44)

The challenge facing all of us – and here, I’m talking not only about the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, the various Bishops’ Conferences around the world, but also groups like yours - is how to confront the question: “How can we become once again capable of symbols?” (*DD* n. 45). I think we have been granted a precious opportunity in the wake of the pandemic to seriously once more engage with the theological and symbolic understanding of the liturgy. As we are moving people off-line and back to in-person celebrations this must present a moment when we can show why being called together in the Church to form part of God’s holy faithful people who sing his praises is qualitatively and substantially different from joining in on a live stream, or worse yet a pre-recorded Mass.

The Pope says that a prerequisite for becoming capable of symbols once again is to “reacquire confidence in creation.” What the Pope means is “that things – and the sacraments ‘are made’ of things – come from God. To Him they are oriented, and by Him they have been assumed, and assumed in a particular way in the Incarnation, so that they can become instruments of salvation, vehicles of the Spirit, channels of grace” (*DD* n. 46). Once again, the Pope underlines how impoverished an either overly spiritualistic or materialistic reading of the liturgy or sacraments is. Ultimately it is damaging for the life of the Church. We must take these created realities seriously for “if created things are such a fundamental, essential part of the sacramental action that brings about our salvation, then we must engage ourselves in their presence with a fresh, non-superficial regard, respectful and grateful.” (*DD* n. 46). The Pope is not saying anything new here, but it is perhaps something we have not attended to sufficiently.

It is after all something one of our own poets, Philip Larkin, intuited when he wrote his poem “Water”:

If I were called in  
To construct a religion  
I should make use of water.

Going to church  
Would entail a fording  
To dry, different clothes;

My liturgy would employ  
Images of sousing,  
A furious devout drench,

And I should raise in the east  
A glass of water  
Where any-angled light  
Would congregate endlessly.<sup>xxiii</sup>

How clearly, for example, do our baptismal liturgies reflect the fact that a newly born Christian has been plunged into the tomb with Christ and been raised up with him? Of course, as the Pope points out, “the celebration of the sacraments, by the grace of God, is efficacious in itself (*ex opere operato*)”, but he continues “this does not guarantee the full involvement of people without an adequate way of their placing themselves in relation to the language of the celebration. A symbolic ‘reading’ is not a mental knowledge, not the acquisition of concepts, but rather a living experience” (DD n. 45). So, one could ask, what type of liturgical celebration will give the best possibility of being immersed in this ‘living experience’? It is important to allow the symbolic language of the liturgy to speak loudly and clearly. We need only listen to the final few paragraphs of the prayer of dedication for a church and an altar to be struck by the breadth of the horizon which the liturgy lays before us:

“Here, may the flood of divine grace  
overwhelm human offenses,  
so that your children, Father,  
being dead to sin,  
may be reborn to heavenly life.

Here, may your faithful,  
gathered around the table of the altar,  
celebrate the memorial of the Paschal Mystery  
and be refreshed by the banquet  
of Christ’s Word and his Body.

Here, may the joyful offering of praise resound,  
with human voices joined to the song of Angels,  
and unceasing prayer rise up to you  
for the salvation of the world.

Here, may the poor find mercy,  
the oppressed attain true freedom,  
and all people be clothed with the dignity of your children,  
until they come exultant  
to the Jerusalem which is above.”<sup>xxiv</sup>

The church building is a figurative metonymy of the Church, the people of God, it is the place where we celebrate the mysteries. It is the threshold that opens into a sacred space that introduces us to the presence of God, a space immersed in the secular city that anticipates the Jerusalem of heaven. In view of what the *lex orandi* of the Church proposes, we can usefully reflect upon how well do we allow this space where the sacraments are celebrated to be, for ourselves and the People of God, the place where a flood of divine grace overwhelms human offences; the refreshing banquet of Christ's Word and Body; the human voice joined to that of the angels for the salvation of the world? Are our celebrations formative in such a way that the poor find mercy, the oppressed true freedom, do they offer, here and now that foretaste of the heavenly Jerusalem? Or are we content, to paraphrase T.S. Eliot, to measure out our liturgy with coffee (or indeed scruple) spoons?<sup>xxv</sup> *Desiderio Desideravi* is an invitation to the whole Church to discover anew, and to be amazed at what the Lord has wrought for his Church which we have access to through the celebration of the mysteries.

A more whole and wholesome celebration of the liturgy, celebrated with all our art and skill (cf. *DD* n. 50), cannot but be a formative experience for the whole Church. When we are formed, we are changed and become more closely conformed to Christ. Thus, the liturgy becomes a living reality and the *lex vivendi* takes hold of us. This was something that Benedict XVI wrote about in stark terms many years ago in an essay entitled "Is the Eucharist a Sacrifice? The Pauline Type: Prophetic Critique of Worship" where he said "A life of faith in Yahweh and love for one's brethren is depicted as true worship, without which external worship becomes an empty, indeed repulsive farce (Ps 40:6ff, 50:7ff, 51:16f; Is 1:11ff; Jer 6:20; 7:22f)."<sup>xxvi</sup> Indeed this is also of a piece with what he wrote in *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 51 on the final dismissal at Mass and subsequently added to the Roman Missal: "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord", "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life", and simply "Go in peace". Pope Francis, in the same vein, in his various interventions concerning the liturgy expresses the desire that it not be an "empty" or "repulsive farce" but a thing filled with grace and beauty, truth and holiness, so that when the Lord gazes upon the Church gathered in worship he can truly cry with tender love "this at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh."

I realise, of course, that this is the very thing that the FDLC has sought to be engaged in such a process, whereby the fruits of the liturgical renewal wrought by the Council could be carried to the people. I can but only encourage you to continue and renew your efforts in this regard. Many of you will be aware that recently a new Apostolic Constitution governing the Roman Curia came into force. In *Praedicate Evangelium*<sup>xxvii</sup> there are ten articles (nn. 88-97) that cover the competencies of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. It is the first of those articles I would like to highlight here which says "The Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments promotes the sacred liturgy in accordance with the renewal undertaken by the Second Vatican Council." (n. 88) This is important because for the first time it has been stated in black and white that our task is to promote the sacred liturgy in accordance with the renewal undertaken by the Second Vatican Council. This had not been said by *Pastor Bonus*, the previous Constitution, nor by any of the other Constitutions which have governed the Curia since the time of Pope Saint Paul VI. Perhaps it did not need saying then, but what the new Apostolic Constitution clearly expresses is that this was the will of the Council whose liturgical reform is irreversible.

Why should this be important? Well, it is of a piece with the Pope's major interventions in the field of liturgy during these past years. For example, the *motu proprio Magnum principium*<sup>xxix</sup> by which Pope Francis emended the Code of Canon Law, restoring to Episcopal Conferences their competencies surrounding the translation of the typical editions of the liturgical books. The *motu proprio* also established the ground for a renewed partnership between Conferences and the Dicastery which is to be marked by mutual collaboration and transparency, something very much to the fore in *Praedicate Evangelium*.

Let me once more point to the importance of *Desiderio Desideravi*. We must be clear that in this letter the Pope is talking about the richness and beauty that is to be found in the liturgy as celebrated according to the liturgical books renewed in the wake of Vatican II. Once again, our Dicastery will be seeking to assist Bishops Conferences to receive and apply the profound teaching and reflection which the Pope has given.

Of course we know that liturgical abuses take place, some of them of a very serious and scandalous nature. Promotion of the renewed liturgy requires us to deal with these matters. I notice, however, that the majority of these abuses are due to lack of formation. Bad practices and abuses require more than disciplinary interventions, necessary as these might be. They need the type of positive engagement with the desire of Christ which Pope Francis has modelled in *Desiderio Desideravi*.

The Pope had already made a clear statement in his 2017 address to the participants of the 68<sup>th</sup> National Liturgical Week in Italy, which goes well beyond the confines of when he delivered it. He made his own the words of Pope Saint Paul VI concerning the necessity of overcoming division and accepting the liturgical reform. He went on to say that what is needed in this moment is “rediscovering the reasons for the decisions taken with regard to the liturgical reform, by overcoming unfounded and superficial readings, a partial reception, and practices that disfigure it. It is not a matter of rethinking the reform by reviewing the choices in its regard, but of knowing better the underlying reasons, through historical documentation, as well as of internalizing its inspirational principles and of observing the discipline that governs it.”<sup>xxx</sup> The Pope’s Apostolic letter on the Liturgical Formation is a precious contribution to that process of “internalizing” the principles of the reform as well as “observing the discipline that governs it”.

Therefore, I do not hesitate to encourage you to be bold, but always charitable in promoting the unique *lex orandi* of the Roman Rite. Discourses on the liturgy that lack a spirit of charity come from a spirit other than that of Christ. For which reason, there is need to make *Desiderio Desideravi* more widely available to parishes, and to help organize guided readings of it, promoting an *ars celebrandi* that is grounded in the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Be active in this task and don’t leave the liturgical field to those small and vocal minorities of whatever hue who seem obstinately to stand against papal authority and against the liturgical reform decreed by the Second Vatican Council and curated and carried forward by Pope Saint Paul VI and his successors. Again, it is important to be clear, as the Pope was in that speech in 2017: “We can affirm with certainty and with magisterial authority that the liturgical reform is irreversible”.

In your reading of *Desiderio Desideravi* you will have noted that Pope Francis quotes Romano Guardini a number of times; indeed, I have relied on him in my own words here today. Guardini’s seminal work “The Spirit of the Liturgy” has long been available in English along with other titles such as “Preparing Yourself for Mass” and “Sacred Signs”. These I commend to you for study and wider dissemination. However, until now there has not been an English translation of his important work “Liturgical Formation”. Happily, that lacuna has now been remedied with the publication of “Liturgy and Liturgical Formation” by Liturgy Training Publications in the United States. I strongly encourage you to make this work known to a wide audience within North America and so continue to respond to the Pope’s call for a renewed appreciation of the liturgy of the Roman Rite as expressed in the books reformed by decree of the Second Vatican Council.

Already, decades ago, the Canadian Jesuit, Bernard Lonergan, saw the difficulty that would lie ahead for the Church in this regard. In words that could be seen as prophetic he wrote:

“Classical culture cannot be jettisoned without being replaced; and what replaces it, cannot but run counter to classical expectations. There is bound to be formed a solid right that is determined to live in a world that no longer exists. There is bound to be formed a scattered left, captivated by now this, now that new development, exploring now this, now that new possibility. But what will

count is perhaps a not numerous center, big enough to be at home in both the old and the new, painstaking enough to work out one by one the transitions to be made, strong enough to refuse half-measures and insist on complete solutions even though it has to wait.”<sup>xxxii</sup>

In other words, we must be patient but not be complacent in resting on our laurels. There is hard work to be done to resist half-measures and a carefree attitude to what is being handed on to us by the Church in faithfulness to Christ. Instead, we must always be working out the good theory in order to confront the bad praxis wherever we find it.

Allow me to finish by quoting from the final paragraphs of the Pope’s letter and using it as an appeal and an inspiration to you as you further your work of studying liturgical singing and instrumental music.

“I would like this letter to help us to rekindle our wonder for the beauty of the truth of the Christian celebration, to remind us of the necessity of an authentic liturgical formation, and to recognize the importance of an art of celebrating that is at the service of the truth of the Paschal Mystery and of the participation of all of the baptized in it, each one according to his or her vocation.

“All this richness is not far from us. It is in our churches, in our Christian feasts, in the centrality of the Lord’s Day, in the power of the sacraments we celebrate. Christian life is a continual journey of growth. We are called to let ourselves be formed in joy and in communion.

“For this I desire to leave you with yet a further indication to follow along our way. I invite you to rediscover the meaning of the *liturgical year* and of *the Lord’s Day*.”<sup>xxxii</sup>

The liturgy is not about knowledge, but reality, as Guardini says. Thus the importance of the Incarnation. The Last Supper has made it possible to touch Jesus’ body in faith, which is taken to the extreme consequences of eating and drinking. How can we not but be amazed (cf. DD 24-26) by this extreme measure of the Blessed Trinity’s desire for us all?

Quoting St Francis of Assisi, as a soliloquy, the Holy Father prayed:

“Let everyone be struck with fear, let the whole world tremble, and let the heavens exult when Christ, the Son of the living God, is present on the altar in the hands of a priest!

O wonderful loftiness and stupendous dignity!

O sublime humility! O humble sublimity!

The Lord of the universe, God and the Son of God,

so humbles Himself that for our salvation

He hides Himself under an ordinary piece of bread!

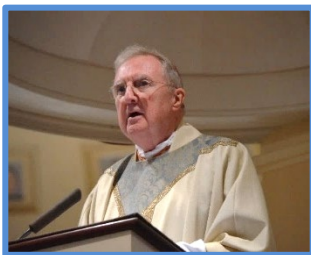
Brothers, look at the humility of God,

and pour out your hearts before Him!

Humble yourselves that you may be exalted by Him!

Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves,

that He Who gives Himself totally to you may receive you totally!”



*Saint Francis of Assisi*

Cardinal Arthur Roche

*Prefect*

Dicastery of Divine Worship & Discipline of the Sacraments

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<sup>i</sup> FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter *Desiderio desideravi*, 29 June 2022.

<sup>ii</sup> William Garrett Horder (1841-1922) was born in Salisbury and educated at the City of London School. Horder compiled several influential hymnals, including *The Book of Praise for Children* (1875), *The Poet's Bible* (New Testament, 1881; Old Testament, 1889), and *Congregational Hymns: A Hymnal for the Free Churches* (1884). His original works include *Intimations of Immortality* (1883), *The Hymn Lover: An Account of the Rise and Growth of English Hymnody* (1889), and *The Silent Voice and Other Discourses* (1890).

<sup>iii</sup> The adaptation was made by Garrett Horder in his 1884 *Congregational Hymns*. The poem explores the ancient practice of Brewing of Soma, a sacred drink believed to have divine powers. Whittier draws parallels between the ancient rituals and contemporary Christian spiritual experiences.

<sup>iv</sup> R. GUARDINI, *Formazione liturgica*, (Brescia: Editrice Morcelliana, 2015), p.45. (Personal translation)

<sup>v</sup> 1Cor II:1

<sup>vi</sup> 1Cor II:17-29

<sup>vii</sup> R. GUARDINI, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. Ada LANE, (London: Sheed & Ward, 1930), p.4

<sup>viii</sup> TERTULLIAN, *De resurrectione carnis*, trans. Alexander SOUTER, *Concerning the Resurrection of the Flesh*, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1922), Chapter 8, pp. 20-21.

<sup>ix</sup> *Ibid*, 8,3, p. 20.

<sup>x</sup> R. GUARDINI, "Then it became clear to me what the foundation of real liturgical piety is..." [www.chiesa.espressionline.it](http://www.chiesa.espressionline.it) on <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/49404%26eng%3Dy.html>, accessed on 13/10/2022. See also: Cf. R. GUARDINI, *Spiegel und Gleichnis. Bilder und Gedanken* [Mirror and Parable: Images and Thoughts], (Mainz-Paderbon, Grünewald-Schöningh, 1990).

<sup>xi</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>xiii</sup> Cf. PAUL VI, Speech Closing the Second Session of the Second Vatican Council, AAS 56 (1964) 34.

<sup>xiii</sup> D. G. DIX, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, (London: Dacre Press, 1945), pp. 744-745.

<sup>xiv</sup> R. GUARDINI, "Then it became clear to me what the foundation of real liturgical piety is..." [www.chiesa.espressionline.it](http://www.chiesa.espressionline.it).

<sup>xv</sup> Cf. R. GUARDINI, "Der Kultakt und die gegenwärtige Aufgabe der Liturgischen Bildung (1964)" in *Liturgie und liturgische Bildung* (Mainz 1992); Eng. trans. "The Cultic Act and the Contemporary Task of Liturgical Formation. A Letter (1964)" in *Liturgy and Liturgical Formation*, (Chicago: Liturgical Press, 2022), pp. 1-8.

<sup>xvi</sup> R. GUARDINI, "Liturgische Bildung (1923)" in *Liturgie und liturgische Bildung* (Mainz 1992); Eng. trans. *Liturgy and Liturgical Formation*, trans. Jan BENTZ, (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2022) p. 16.

<sup>xvii</sup> *Ibid*. p. 21.

<sup>xviii</sup> *Ibid*. p. 21.

<sup>xix</sup> *Ibid*. p. 21.

<sup>xx</sup> *Ibid*. p. 21.

<sup>xxi</sup> *Ibid*. p. 21.

<sup>xxii</sup> L. BEAUDUIN, "De promovenda Sacra Liturgia," in *Questions liturgiques et paroissiales* 6 (1924), p. 237.

<sup>xxiii</sup> P. LARKIN, *Water*, <https://allpoetry.com/poem/8495701-Water-by-Philip-Larkin>, accessed on 05/10/2022.

<sup>xxiv</sup> *Pontificale Romanum: Ordo dedicationis ecclesiae et altaris*, editio typica, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1977), p. xxx.

<sup>xxv</sup> T.S. ELIOT, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/44212/the-love-song-of-j-alfred-prufrock>, accessed on 05/10/2022.

<sup>xxvi</sup> J. RATZINGER, "Theology of the Liturgy: The Sacramental Foundation of Christian Existence", in *Joseph Ratzinger Collected Works 11*, ed. M.J. MILLER and trans. J. SAWARD et. al., (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014), p. 212.

<sup>xxvii</sup> FRANCIS, Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, 19 March 2022.

<sup>xxviii</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, 28 June 1988.

<sup>xxix</sup> FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter *Magnum principium*, 9 September 2017.

<sup>xxx</sup> FRANCIS, Address to Participants in the 68<sup>th</sup> National Liturgical Week in Italy, 24 August 2017, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/august/documents/papa-francesco\\_20170824\\_settimana-liturgica-nazionale.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/august/documents/papa-francesco_20170824_settimana-liturgica-nazionale.html), accessed on 05/10/2022.

<sup>xxxi</sup> B. LONERGAN, S.J., "Dimensions of Meaning", in *Collection*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe, 2nd ed., (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 245.

<sup>xxxii</sup> FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter *Desiderio desideravi*, 29 June 2022, nn. 62-62.



Cardinal Pierre presides at the Cathedral



Cardinal Roche surprised with a McManus Award



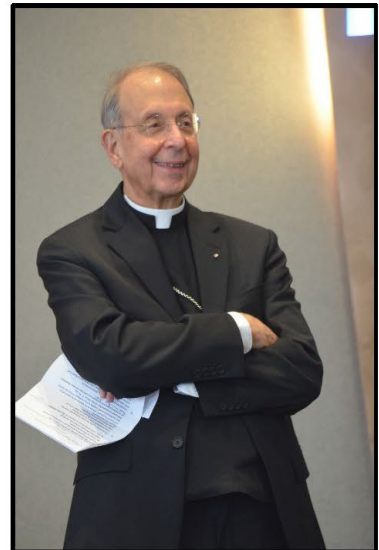
Abbot Gregory Polan, OSB in procession



Fr. Juan Ochoa (Region X) with  
Dr. Bernadette Kime (Region IV)



Fr. Dustin Dought updates the members  
on the liturgical texts



Archbishop Lori prepares to welcome  
the FDLC to Baltimore



The Board gathers after Mass at the Basilica of the Assumption



Seminarians prepare before Night Prayer at St. Mary's Seminary