

# **‘That Our Sacrifice Maybe Pleasing to God’**

Fraternal Letter to my Brother Priests

My beloved brother priests:

On the day of our ordination as priests, the bishop asked us, *“Do you resolve to celebrate faithfully and reverently, in accord with the Church’s tradition, the mysteries of Christ, especially the sacrifice of the Eucharist and the sacrament of reconciliation, for the glory of God and the sanctification of the Christian people?”*

Although we have many duties and functions as priests, in the mind of the ordinary Catholic faithful, we are priests because we can preside at the Eucharist and absolve sins in the confessional. We are priests called to bring to the Lord the sacrifice of thanksgiving from His worshipping people. We are priests called to bring the blessings of God to His chosen people. We are caretakers of the mysteries of God.

The faithful, reverent, dignified and solemn celebration of the mysteries of Christ is a mandate imposed on us by ordination. It is a solemn duty.

Good liturgy does not just happen. It is made to happen. Good liturgy calls for fervent preparation and attentive care.

Within this spirit, I wish to raise some issues in our Catholic parishes and communities to help bring about a more inspiring and truly edifying liturgical worship.

## **Cleanliness is next to Godliness**

I encourage you to maintain the cleanliness of our sacred vessels particularly our chalices and ciboria. God deserves the best. Sacred vessels need regular metal plating to maintain their luster befitting the divine worship.

The altar linens—corporal, purificator and finger towel—are not interchangeable. The corporal is named such because it receives the *“corpus”* crumbs that may fall from the host when we break the Host at Lamb of God. The corporal must be laid out on the altar only at the presentation of bread and wine and folded back after the purification of the vessels. It must not be left on the altar. According to traditional practice, the corporal is *“starched”* after washing so that it will be stiff when used at the altar. The *“starched stiffness”* facilitates finding the crumbs that may fall on it during the Eucharist. The purificator is used to wipe the chalice for droplets of water and wine during the preparation of the gifts and for purifying the chalice, paten and ciborium after Communion. Traditionally, the purificator has an embroidered cross which rests on the mouth of the chalice or some liturgical symbols on the sides. The finger towel is used for drying the hands after washing. To distinguish it from the purificator, the embroidered cross of the finger towel is usually on the corner and not in the middle. Please instruct your sacristans and altar servers to observe the proper use of altar linens.

We must take special care that our Mass vestments are clean and dignified. Cleanliness and dignity need not be expensive. Dignity and cleanliness in the choice and

use of liturgical vestments is not optional. It is imperative on account of the dignity of the liturgy we celebrate. Please dispose of old, tattered and faded vestments properly by burning them.

The church and its surroundings must be kept clean too from trash candy wrappers, soiled missalettes and even stuck chewing gums on the church flooring. Cleanliness is next to Godliness. The church must be the cleanest place in the community.

### **He Who Sings Well Prays Twice**

Singing is a form of worship. Singing together also promotes the spirit of unity and communion. Please encourage the choirs to undertake their task as a ministry and not as a performance for public adulation. It is important that the community is animated to join the choir in singing our songs during the liturgy. Secular love songs, even if they have religious themes, do not have any place in the divine liturgy. In obedience to the instructions of the Holy See and until the rules pertaining to dancing within the liturgy have been approved by the Episcopal Commission on Liturgy, please refrain from the practice of having children or young people dance in the parish sanctuary.

### **And the Greatest of These is Love**

Love is best expressed in silence. Where silence is observed, fervor is maintained. Let me offer to you these words from Saint Charles Borromeo on whose feastday, I was installed as your pastor: *“You must realize that for us churchmen, nothing is more necessary than meditation. We must meditate before, during and after everything we do. Would you like me to tell you how to give God more pleasing worship? Stay quiet with God. Do not spend your time in useless chatter.”*

Please teach the flock again about the Catholic practice of genuflecting before the tabernacle, the observance of prayerful silence in the church, modesty in dress and the discourtesy of chewing gum or using cell phones in the church.

Finally, liturgy is not just obedience to the rubrics and instructions. Good liturgy must make us more loving. Good liturgy cannot save. Only the power of love can bring us to heaven. As a fruit of the faithful and reverent celebration of the mysteries of Christ, we must become more caring and attentive to the needs of the least, the last and the lost. Good liturgy can sanctify only to the extent that it leads us to serve, imitating the example of Him who stooped down to wash the feet of His disciples. Sunday must not only be the *dies Domini*. May it become too our *dies caritatis*.

May Saint John, the Beloved Disciple, our patron, help us to grow in holiness and lead us to share the same gift of holiness to all those entrusted to our care.

From the Cathedral of Saint John the Evangelist, December 31, 2009

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