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— From the Director of the Archdiocesan Office of Worship & Spiritual Life —

THE ANCIENT MASS AND THE CALL TO AUTHENTIC WORSHIP

WHAT happens at Mass is not just a weekly routine or a personal devotion—it is an encounter with the living God, a participation in the worship of the early Church, and a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy. Suppose we ever doubt the importance of how we celebrate the liturgy. In that case, we need only turn to one of the earliest Christian witnesses, St. Justin Martyr, who described the Eucharist with striking clarity nearly 1,900 years ago. In his *First Apology*, written in the second century, Justin provides a detailed account of the Eucharistic celebration. His description is remarkable—not just because it proves the ancient roots of our liturgical worship but also because it shows the intimate connection between the liturgy and the life of faith.

"Having ended the prayers, we salute one another with a kiss. There is then brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup of wine mixed with water; and he taking them, gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at His hands." (First Apology, 65)

Even in the early years of the Church, the structure of the Mass was already in place: the assembly of believers, communal prayers, the Eucharistic thanksgiving offered by the presiding minister, and the distribution of Holy Communion. What stands out most, however, is how the early Christians approached the liturgy—with awe, gratitude, and the conviction that it was essential to their salvation.

Justin does not present the Mass as something casual or adapted to personal preferences. Instead, he describes a solemn and ordered act of worship, one in which every part is directed toward God with reverence and devotion. The faithful did not simply attend; they actively participated, expressing their assent with the great "Amen" and receiving the Eucharist with a profound awareness of its significance.

This ancient testimony should challenge us today. The way we celebrate the liturgy shapes people's faith. When Mass is celebrated with beauty, dignity, and fidelity to the Church's tradition, it lifts the hearts of the faithful toward God and immerses them in the mystery of salvation. On the other hand, when the liturgy is treated as a performance, entertainment, or a mere obligation, it risks becoming something that people endure rather than encounter.

As ministers, musicians, lectors, and faithful participants, we must ask ourselves: Does our liturgical celebration reflect the reality that St. Justin and the early Christians knew? Do we approach the Eucharist as the most sacred moment of our day, or have we allowed routine and distraction to take hold?

The Eucharistic celebration is not just about preserving an ancient tradition but drawing souls into the mystery of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection. It is about forming disciples who, as Justin says, "may be counted worthy, now that we have learned the truth, by our works also to be found good citizens and keepers of the commandments."

This is why liturgy matters—and why doing it well matters. It is not for aesthetics or personal preference but because the way we worship shapes what we believe and how we live. The early Christians knew this. Do we?

— Fr. Vigoa

THE PROPER TIME FOR THE COLLECTION: A LITURGICAL CLARIFICATION

IN MANY parishes, confusion arises regarding the timing of the collection during Mass. Some assume that the offertory procession—the moment when the gifts of bread and wine are brought to the altar—also includes the monetary offerings of the faithful. However, the Church’s liturgical books clarify that these are distinct actions.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM)* states:

“It is desirable that the faithful’s participation be expressed by the offering of the bread and wine for the celebration of the Eucharist and other gifts to relieve the needs of the Church and of the poor.” (*GIRM* 140)

While financial contributions are an essential way for the faithful to support the Church’s mission, the *GIRM* clarifies that the procession of gifts refers specifically to the elements for the Eucharist. The collection itself should take place before the gifts of bread and wine are brought forward, ensuring a smooth transition to the liturgical action of the altar.

Thus, ushers should not wait for the collection baskets to reach the front before allowing the offertory procession to begin. The collection is a practical necessity, but it remains distinct from the liturgical act of presenting the Eucharistic gifts. Properly organizing these elements helps maintain the theological and ritual integrity of the Mass.

By following this guideline, parishes can foster a clearer and more reverent celebration of the Sacred Liturgy, allowing each moment to unfold as the Church intends.

-RJV

SACRED MUSIC AT MASS: WHY RECORDED MUSIC IS NOT PERMITTED

AGUEST at a recent wedding in one of our parishes raised concerns about using recorded music during the liturgy. While couples may have sentimental attachments to particular songs, the Church is clear: live music, not pre-recorded tracks, is required for the sacred liturgy.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM)* states:

“The singing is to be done in a manner suited to the solemnity of the celebration and the nature of each part and by the ministers and the people according to the

norms prescribed for it.” (*GIRM* 39)

Similarly, the *Instruction on Music in the Liturgy (Musicam Sacram)* insists:

“Recorded music lacks the authenticity and the sacred character proper to the liturgical celebration.” (*Musicam Sacram* 60)

Liturgical music is not mere background sound but an active, living part of worship. The voice of the Church, expressed through the human voice and live instruments, elevates prayer and fosters participation in the sacred mysteries.

While receptions and other gatherings may use recorded music, the Mass is a sacred action that calls for live expression. Upholding this norm ensures that our worship remains truly liturgical, giving glory to God in a way that is both reverent and faithful to the Church’s teaching. -RJV

THE PROPER DISMISSAL: WORDS MATTER IN THE LITURGY

AT THE conclusion of Mass, the deacon or priest sends the faithful forth with the official words of dismissal, calling them to carry the grace of the Eucharist into the world. However, some have noticed a common but unofficial phrasing: “The Mass is ended; go in peace to love and serve the Lord.” While it sounds well-intentioned, this is actually a blending of two different dismissals rather than one of the approved formulas.

The *Roman Missal* (p. 567) provides the following options:

“Go forth, the Mass is ended.”

“Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.”

“Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.”

“Go in peace.”

The Church carefully chooses the words of the dismissal to reflect the mission of the faithful: having been nourished by Word and Sacrament, they are now sent forth in peace to live out the Gospel.

Faithfulness to the liturgy, even in small details, matters. The dismissal is not simply a formality—it is a commissioning, a sending forth in the name of Christ. By using the words given by the Church, we preserve the unity and integrity of the Mass, ensuring that every element remains faithful to its purpose. Go forth—correctly! -RJV

THE FINAL BLESSING: WHY “MAY ALMIGHTY GOD BLESS US” IS INCORRECT

THE final blessing at Mass is not just a routine conclusion—it is a moment when the priest, acting in the person of Christ, imparts God’s blessing upon the people. Recently, I heard the main celebrant say, “May almighty God bless us...” instead of the proper wording, “May almighty God bless you...”—a common mistake that alters the meaning of the blessing.

The *Roman Missal* (Order of Mass, p. 568) prescribes the blessing as follows:

Priest: “*May almighty God bless you, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*”

This distinction matters. The priest is not blessing himself along with the congregation but extending God’s blessing upon the faithful. His role at that moment is to impart the blessing, not to receive it with the assembly. When he uses “us,” he changes the meaning and structure of the blessing, which is not permitted by the rubrics.

While it may seem like a small detail, fidelity to the words of the liturgy ensures that the priest’s role remains clear and that the blessing retains its proper theological significance. The people of God deserve the liturgy as the Church intends—not altered or adjusted based on personal preference. So let the words be spoken as they are given: “*May almighty God bless you.*” -RJV



CLAPPING DURING MASS: WHAT DOES THE CHURCH SAY?

IN MANY parishes, it is common to hear applause during Mass—often following a particularly moving piece of music, an announcement, or even after the homily. But is this appropriate in the context of the sacred liturgy? Does the Church make any distinctions between clapping and applause?

Pope St. John Paul II addressed this question directly, stating:

“When applause breaks out in the liturgy because of some human achievement, it is a sure sign that the essence of liturgy has disappeared and has been replaced by a kind of religious entertainment.” (Address to Italian Clergy, February 22, 1980)

The liturgy is first and foremost the worship of God. While clapping is a natural human response to something beautiful or moving, the Mass is not a performance, but a sacred action centered on Christ’s sacrifice. Applause—especially during moments such as post-Communion hymns—can shift the focus away from prayer and reflection to human accomplishment.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) does not mention applause as part of the liturgical norms, further reinforcing that it is not an expected or encouraged element of the Mass. However, there are rare occasions when applause might be fitting, such as during a rite within the Mass that includes an expression of joy—for example, the ordination of a priest, the recessional at the chrism mass, the profession of religious vows, or the welcoming of catechumens in the Rite of Christian Initiation. Even in these cases, the applause is not for performance but for a liturgical moment of communal joy.

In my own parish, this has been addressed not by reprimanding the faithful but by subtle example. When the choir offers a beautiful post-Communion hymn, I do not clap, nor do I acknowledge any clapping that may arise. Instead, I move on to the next part of the Mass, allowing the liturgy to guide the moment rather than human custom. Over time, this approach has helped the community understand that the liturgy is not a concert but a sacred encounter with God.

Ultimately, the question is not about strict rules but about preserving the spirit of the liturgy. By keeping our focus on Christ, we allow the Mass to be what it is meant to be: a place of worship, not entertainment. -RJV

THE BEAUTY OF THE PERMANENT DIACONATE: A LIVING ICON OF CHRIST THE SERVANT

IN RECENT weeks, several holy and faithful married men have approached me with questions about the permanent diaconate. Their interest speaks to something profound—the recognition that they see in the men who serve Jesus Christ, the Servant. The diaconate is not a mere function or title, nor is the deacon a glorified altar server. Rather, the deacon's vocation is a vital and irreplaceable ministry in the life of the Church.

The permanent diaconate is rooted in the earliest days of Christianity, when the Apostles, overwhelmed by the growing needs of the faithful, appointed seven men to assist in the ministry (Acts 6:1-7). Since then, deacons have been entrusted with a threefold ministry—one that is fused into their very being through ordination:

The Ministry of the Word – Deacons proclaim the Gospel, preach, and instruct the faithful, calling them deeper into the mysteries of Christ.

The Ministry of Liturgy – Deacons assist at the altar, distribute the Eucharist, baptize, witness marriages, and lead prayer in the name of the Church.

The Ministry of Charity, Justice, and Service – Deacons are sent to the peripheries, to gravesides, ministering to the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, and the forgotten, embodying Christ's call to serve rather than to be served (Mark 10:45).

A deacon is not a substitute priest or a helper at Mass. He is an ordained minister with a unique and powerful role: to be a bridge between the sanctuary and the streets, bringing the presence of Christ to those in need.

Every deacon is sent forth by the bishop, charged with carrying the light of the Gospel into the world. Through their ministry, they lead the faithful into deeper communion with Christ and extend the Church's reach into communities where the love of God is most desperately needed. Their presence reminds us that service is not an afterthought in the Christian life—it is at its heart.

Most importantly, deacons are not just men of service—they are men who inspire. By their witness, they encourage others to deepen their relationship with God, to serve more generously, and to seek holiness in their own vocations. A deacon's ministry is not only what he does but who he is—a model of faith, sacrifice, and love for all the faithful.

For those discerning this call, know that the diaconate is not about status but about sacrifice. It is a vocation that requires a generous heart, a deep prayer life, and an unwavering commitment to Christ and His Church. In the end, it is a profound gift—both to the men who are called and to the Church they serve. -RJV



NOTE

MANY of the topics addressed in this newsletter focus on what may seem like small details. However, when we consider the liturgy is the “source and summit” of the Christian life (Lumen Gentium, 11), it becomes clear that even these finer points are worth our attention. Following the Church's instructions is not merely about rules but fidelity, unity, and ensuring that our worship remains free from unnecessary distractions.

This commitment to proper liturgical practice is rooted in both obedience and a desire for uniformity where the Church calls for it. When priests, deacons, and ministers conform to the rubrics, the faithful can enter more deeply into the mysteries being celebrated. As the old adage says: “Do the red, say the black.”

Moreover, many of the gestures and words prescribed in the liturgy are not just directives but expressions of beauty and reverence. In that spirit, this newsletter is not intended to shame or criticize but to assist. I trust that most priests or deacons who may be inadvertently straying from these details will welcome the opportunity to adjust, ensuring that our worship remains faithful, reverent, and focused on Christ. -RJV

A DISCIPLINE THAT GOES BEYOND RULES



EVERY year, as Lent begins, Catholics are asked to take part in the time-honored practices of fasting and abstinence. And many are asking why we do this. These are not mere traditions, nor are they arbitrary rules imposed by the Church. They are spiritual disciplines that draw us closer to God, discipline our bodies, and open our hearts to true freedom.

But why do we fast? Why do we abstain from meat? And what does it all mean?

Fasting vs. Abstinence: What's the Difference?

First, it's important to distinguish between fasting and abstinence:

Fasting refers to limiting the quantity of food we eat. According to the Church's law, on days of fasting—Ash Wednesday and Good Friday—Catholics are allowed one full meal and two smaller meals that together do not equal a full meal. Snacking between meals is not permitted, though liquids (like water, coffee, and tea) may be taken.

Abstinence refers to refraining from a certain type of food—specifically, meat. Catholics abstain from meat on all Fridays during Lent, as well as on Ash Wednesday.

This distinction between quantity and quality helps us understand the deeper purpose of these practices: self-denial for the sake of a greater good.

Why Meat? What's So Special About It?

The question often arises: Why do Catholics abstain from meat? Why not sweets, alcohol, or other indulgences?

Historically, abstaining from meat was considered a significant sacrifice because meat was seen as a rich, luxurious food—often associated with feasting and celebration. It was also believed that flesh meat had a connection to the bodily passions, and avoiding it helped train the soul in discipline and self-control.

Over time, the Church allowed for greater flexibility, permitting dairy and fish (which were considered simpler forms of sustenance). However, the principle remains the same: We give up something good—not because it is bad, but to remind ourselves that we do not live by food alone, but by God.

Fasting and abstinence are not mere human inventions; they are deeply rooted in Sacred Scripture.

Jesus Himself fasted for forty days in the desert, resisting the devil's temptations (Matthew 4:1-11).

Moses fasted before receiving the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:28).

The Ninevites fasted in repentance, and God spared them (Jonah 3:5-10).

Early Christians fasted to prepare for important moments of prayer and mission (Acts 13:2-3).

Fasting was always linked to repentance, purification, and seeking God's presence. It is a way of saying, *"Lord, You are more important than my physical cravings. You alone sustain me."*

The Church does not require fasting and abstinence to burden us but to liberate us. True freedom does not come from indulging every desire but from mastering them.

St. Augustine beautifully explains the effects of fasting:

"Abstinence purifies the soul, elevates the mind, subordinates the flesh to the spirit, begets a humble and contrite heart, scatters the clouds of concupiscence, extinguishes the fire of lust, and enkindles the true light of chastity."

In other words, fasting is not just about food—it is about transforming our entire being.

Who Is Required to Fast and Abstain?

The Church, in her wisdom, sets guidelines for these practices:

Fasting (Ash Wednesday & Good Friday) is required for those ages 18-59.

Abstinence from meat (Fridays in Lent & Ash Wednesday) applies to all Catholics age 14 and older.

Those with medical conditions, pregnant women, or those in situations of hardship are not bound by these rules. The Church always encourages prudence and charity.

While the Church's laws set the minimum standard, fasting and abstinence are meant to inspire us to go further.

Some Catholics choose to give up more than meat—perhaps sweets, alcohol, social media, or another attachment that keeps them from God. Others practice fasting beyond Lent, using it as a regular spiritual discipline throughout the year.

The goal is not to do the least required but to enter more deeply into the spirit of Lent—a time of conversion, renewal, and drawing closer to Christ.

“For through bodily fasting you restrain our faults, raise up our minds, and bestow both virtue and its rewards.”
(*Preface IV of Lent*)

Let us embrace this discipline—not as a burden, but as a pathway to holiness. -RJV



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