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Archbishop Blair Addresses the 2022 National Meeting of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions

The 2022 National Meeting of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions took place in New Orleans from October 4-6, under the theme “Ars Celebrandi: Something More is Required.” Major presentations were given by the Very Rev. Patrick Beidelman (Archdiocese of Indianapolis), Rev. Bruce Cinquegrani (Diocese of Memphis), and Sr. Judith Kubicki, CFFS. The participants were also addressed during the meeting by Hartford Archbishop Leonard P. Blair, Committee Chairman; his remarks are reprinted for the benefit of our readers:

Since the last meeting, much has transpired in the liturgical realm: the new *editio typica* for the institution of catechists; the recent implementation of the new translation of the rites of Ordination and the upcoming implementation of the new translation of the *Order of Penance*; approval by the U.S. bishops of the revised National Statutes on the Catechumenate and the new translations of the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* and *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery outside Mass*; and lastly, the norms implementing *Magnum principium*, the Holy Father’s *motu proprio* on liturgical translation.

New texts, new translations of old texts, and new processes for the translation of new and old texts: all these things are of importance. However, one development from the past year will arguably have a broader effect than any of those I’ve just mentioned, namely, the Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis, *Desiderio desideravi*, on the liturgical formation of the People of God. This is not to minimize the importance of the translation and implementation of rites, but this activity is not our ultimate purpose. The goal for which we must strive, as the Holy Father states in his letter, is to live the liturgical action fully and to help others to do so (nos. 27, 31). If we do not foster and facilitate authentic participation in the Church’s worship, then our translation and implementation efforts fall short of their ultimate purpose.

How appropriate the Holy Father’s letter is to this national meeting, focused as it is on the topic “*Ars Celebrandi: Something More is Required.*” I’d like to offer some reflections on *Desiderio desideravi*, and ask the question: “What is at the heart of liturgical participation?” In other words, what is the “something more” that is required?

Is that “something more” simply a matter of *preparation and careful observance of rubrics*? In his letter, the Holy Father indicates that “every aspect of the celebration must be carefully tended to and every rubric must be observed” (no. 23). Why? Because, he notes, “the rite is in itself a norm, and the norm is never an end in itself,

but it is always at the service of a higher reality that it means to protect” (no. 48). The norm of the rite – expressed in its rubrics – preserves higher realities. Whenever we depart from the rite – whether in large or small ways – we are in danger of obscuring, misrepresenting or even vitiating the gift that God wants to give through the ministry of the Church. Hence the Holy Father’s rather strong words that to do so is to rob the assembly what is owed to it; namely, the ritual celebration of the Paschal Mystery established by Christ and the Church (no. 23). Rubrical observance is a necessary condition for authentic liturgical participation, one that we cannot do without, even though it is not sufficient in itself.

What about knowledge? Is *knowledge of the liturgy* – of its theological foundation, its history, its texts, its signs and symbols – is that the “something more”? In the second section of his letter, which deals with liturgical formation, the Holy Father calls the whole Church to promote among the faithful a knowledge of the liturgy, particularly its theological foundation, in an accessible way that is more than academic (no. 35). Yet while this too is important, knowledge about the liturgy is in itself insufficient. What Pope Benedict once said comes to mind, that the gospel is not so much informational as transformational. And liturgy, Pope Francis observes, is not merely mental adherence to something (no. 12), but an integral encounter of the Church with the mystery of Christ and his saving work.

The “something more” then cannot be reduced to rubrics or even knowledge. What about *technique*? Having observed the rubrics, having understood the liturgy’s theological foundation, perhaps all that remains is to carry out the liturgy with dignity and a certain finesse? Indeed, the Holy Father calls us to carry out every gesture and word of the liturgy “with art” (no. 53). But the art of celebration that he has in mind – while not excluding dignified movement and eloquent proclamation – isn’t reducible to either of them. He writes, “For an artisan, technique is enough. But for an artist, in addition to technical knowledge, there has also to be inspiration, which is a positive form of possession. The true artist does not possess an art but rather is possessed by it” (no. 50). The art that he has in mind cannot be learned in a technical course. It’s something more.

So then, liturgical rubrics, knowledge, and technique are not enough. Each is necessary but insufficient for authentic liturgical participation. We might say if rubrics were sufficient, then Christ could be reduced to an external ritual. If knowledge about the liturgy were chief, Christ could be reduced to an abstraction. And if technique were supreme, then the liturgy would be voided of what Pope Francis says is essential, namely, “Christian faith is either an encounter with Him alive, or it does not exist” (no. 10).

According to the Pope the “something more” that is required for the encounter with the living Christ, is *astonishment*. He describes it as “astonishment at the fact that the paschal mystery is rendered present in the concreteness of sacramental signs” (no. 24). He goes on to characterize it as “marveling at the fact that the salvific plan of God has been revealed in the paschal deed of Jesus, and the power of this paschal deed continues to reach us in the celebration of the ‘mysteries,’ of the sacraments” (no. 25). The Word has become flesh and dwelt among us. The Word has given up his body and poured out his blood for us. He has died and risen and now sits at the Father’s right hand. By the power of the Holy Spirit, everything of the Incarnate Word has passed into the sacraments – his every word, his every gesture, glance, and feeling.

And yet, even for those of us who work so closely and so frequently with the liturgy, familiarity can breed, certainly not contempt, as the saying goes, but a certain lukewarmness. Before this great mystery, Pope Francis asks, “How can the misfortune of distancing ourselves happen to us?” (no. 24). We know from experience that it does happen. And when it does, when we stand before this great mystery with indifference, we become, the Pope says, “impermeable to the ocean of grace that floods every celebration” (no. 24).

How then do we preserve our sense of wonder? How do we foster it if it has grown cold? The answer is only by complementing and prolonging the prayer of the liturgy with the quiet of personal prayer. At the recent consistory, the Holy Father encouraged the cardinals-elect to complement the powerful flame of the Spirit of God with the quiet, gentle, and longer lasting charcoal fire of the risen Christ’s final appearance to the disciples in the Gospel of John. There, the disciples, “amazed and moved, savor their closeness to their Lord.” Pope Francis points out that “this fire burns in a particular way in the prayer of *adoration*, when we silently stand before the Eucharist and

bask in the humble, discreet and hidden presence of the Lord.” To foster and preserve the “something more” requires this personal and deep prayer.

So, to return to our initial question: “What is at the heart of liturgical participation?” What is the “something more” that’s required? Without minimizing the importance of thorough preparation and careful observation of rubrics, knowledge of the liturgy, and technical skill, the heart of liturgical participation is wonder fostered through prayer. My hope for you who participate in this National Meeting is that, together with the insights, the fellowship, and the good time you enjoy together, you will depart from here with a renewed astonishment at Christ and his Paschal Mystery. I pray that you will leave here renewed in wonder.

Carmen Aguinaco Presented with McManus Award

During the 2022 National Meeting of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions in New Orleans, the annual Frederick R. McManus Award for contributions in furthering the liturgical renewal in the United States was presented to Ms. Carmen F. Aguinaco, former Multicultural Specialist of the USCCB Secretariat of Divine Worship (2016-2021). Excerpts from her acceptance address are reprinted for the benefit of our readers:

Good evening. Board of Directors, thank you for a totally undeserved award. I receive it in the name of the Hispanic community who have taught me so much about faith, prayer, and liturgy for over more than 40 years. We Hispanics relate better to stories than to abstract concepts. So, I will start with a short story that seems to me to reflect well what I have been trying to do through my work in liturgy, as well as what I sense liturgy is about.

Micaela was a simple woman studying in an adult Education Center in a suburb of Chicago. She had never completed her elementary education. She was bright, dedicated, and enthusiastic. Working hard, she was able to complete her elementary certificate, and went on to obtain her GED, all in a very short time. One day she commented: “You know, I love my husband, and I know he loves me. But we don’t have the language to express it. And that is one of the reasons I come to these classes.”

It seems to me that something similar is what happens with people who love God. Most Hispanics love God and want to express their love. They want to taste the love of God expressed in the liturgy, but, without the ritual books, without the actual liturgy well celebrated, they don’t have the language. They seek ways; sometimes they try to express their love by imitating popular culture... or other ritualistic practices; but, somehow, that is never completely satisfying.

The language of entertainment and table talk does not quite express the love for the Most High, for “His Majesty,” as Saint Teresa of Avila used to say. Moreover, all too often, the Hispanic community in the United States had been deprived of the possibility of celebrating both in the language of their heart and in the timeless language of the Church in its most reverent and dignified expressions. The resources were not equally accessible, and the formation simply had not been there.

The process of consultation for the V Encuentro really emphasized the need of the Hispanic community to become “fluent” in this language of the liturgy as a question of survival for both their Catholic faith and their Hispanic identity. Liturgy is essential for the identity of a people for whom the Gospel has been intrinsically linked to culture. At the present moment, it becomes a question of survival because, if the next generations do not find that same language, they will lose who they are as Hispanics... and as Catholics. They will lose their roots and become spiritually homeless because they won’t be able to recognize the language of the heart they once learned from their mothers and grandmothers, godparents, aunts, uncles. Such language goes beyond mere Spanish grammar and vocabulary. It includes a whole world of symbols, sounds, senses.

I am not a liturgist by trade. I went to the Secretariat of Divine Worship almost by accident, almost as a little “adventure” in response to a call to serve the Church after what I thought was my first retirement. It is probably unprecedented for the FDLC to give an award for “advancing the cause of liturgy after Vatican II” to a person

who is not a liturgist, or even a theologian! So, I am as surprised and shocked as some of you may be. I am also deeply humbled. But I myself love God and, in the language of the liturgy, I found a way to express it that was not my own, and that I often did not even comprehend. That the language was a mystery does not really matter, or rather, it matters a great deal because that mystery is what transports us to the heart of God.

In my work, I was simply trying to provide the beloved Hispanic Catholic community with a “language” that is Hispanic, but that goes beyond Spanish words, so that they could express their love for God. What I found was actually the language taught by God’s own love in the beauty, light, awe, and reverence that transcends words, while including them. This is a language that includes music, light, incense, processions, gestures, united to the words of ancient and ever new collects, Eucharistic prayers, responses that seem to be, not so much fixed in time, but outside of time and space while happening in time and space. Having been evangelized by a Mediterranean culture that often echoed their own indigenous roots, Hispanic Catholics depend greatly on the senses and use symbols for their regular expression. The incarnational and enculturated approach of the Spanish catechists (the ones who accompanied the conquerors and explorers into the New World), sought to use symbols and images that people could understand and could, in many cases, be easily integrated into their own mindset and imagination. The early missionaries did not know the native languages and so, they used their own creativity in creating illustrated catechisms, and dramas that still survive in the practices of popular religiosity, such as *Posadas*, *Via Crucis*, *Pastorelas*, *cascarones*, *villancicos*, *aguinaldos*, *griterías*, and so on and so forth. *Flor y Canto* is not just the name of the hymnal book from OCP, but the whole sense of how the people express their love for God and for the mystery. Flowers and birds are prominent in Hispanic religious iconography: symbols of color and life, and of the music that is lifted up in praise.

I had been writing my whole life, but now I was in front of a completely different challenge: not so much to create a language but to support the understanding of the language of the liturgy. My work was, of course, immersed in words, grammatical rules, and best expressions. But in the course of working on the *Misal*, the *Bendicional*, the *RICA*, and other ritual books, I went deeper and deeper into my love, not just for the Spanish language, but for all that surrounds the rites, symbols and sounds that, together, constitute the language of dialogue between God and people.

So, at the end of over six years and well into my second “quasi-retirement,” have I become a liturgist deserving of such a wonderful award? Of course not! I was simply a scribe following the directions of the Secretariat of Divine Worship and of the Subcommittee on Divine Worship in Spanish, to whom I am forever indebted. I have, in a way, become a sort of modern medieval monk chasing elusive commas or chasing them away, as the case may be. An awesome task in any case and a great privilege and grace. Fr. Andrew Menke jokingly once said I should be paying the USCCB for reading the Bible and getting an education... and, seriously, I really should! Except that I would never have enough money or time to do that. I am forever grateful to Fr. Michael Flynn, who first hired me. My deepest gratitude goes to Fr. Menke, who had to endure my ignorance and gently introduced me into the mysteries of a new language and whose friendship honors me; to Fr. Randy Stice for his continued friendship and support, and to the staff of the Secretariat of Divine Worship. To all the great colleagues and friends who extended their hospitality to me throughout these years, my deepest gratitude and admiration.

I am also grateful to Archbishop Gregory Aymond, who first invited me to the Subcommittee, Bishop Octavio Cisneros who brought me into this work, Bishop Daniel García and the Subcommittee, the *Instituto Nacional Hispano de Liturgia* and the FDLC for the work done in formation in liturgy for Hispanics. And to Rita Thiron, for her friendship and great times while conducting the workshops on the *Misal* and for her personal support to all these endeavors.

A grateful remembrance goes to my two predecessors, Sr. Doris Turek, who passed away a few years ago, and Sylvia Sánchez, good friends who showed me enthusiasm for and commitment to the liturgy. And, finally, to my sisters, Pilar and Virginia, who are here with me today, as they have always been. They have always generously supported any and all of my adventures. They really have the language of the heart. And to all of you who have helped me to learn a great deal of that language and have allowed me the great privilege of being able to contribute some little commas and periods to it. Thank you!