

Homily - 28th Sunday of the Year A

Beloved in Christ, we continue our ongoing catechesis on “Implementing the 3rd Edition of the *Roman Missal*.” One goal is to renew the zeal and fervor of the faithful for the Mass, that “encountering the Liturgy anew in the new text, can deepen their sharing in Christ’s sacrifice.” Drawing on our bulletin insert, today our catechesis will focus on effective “Liturgical Participation.” This is a very crucial step because many Catholics attend Masses regularly, but do not understand the in-depth meaning of the Mass. Indeed, how can one fruitfully participate in what one does not properly understand? Thus, our First Reading (Isa 25:6-10a) and the Gospel passage (Matt 22:1-14) lead us to ask, What is the Liturgy about? How should people respond to God’s invitation? What comportment should they have during the Mass?

How privileged we are as Catholic Christians! Beloved, the Liturgy or the Holy Mass is about the marriage feast or wedding banquet of the Lamb. Scripture says, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev 19:9). In this context, Christ presents today’s parable in our Gospel: “The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.” Our First Reading adds: it is “a feast of rich food and choice wines.” This is not ordinary food and drink; the Liturgy is the rich spiritual food of the Body of Christ and the choice spiritual wines of the Blood of Christ.

“Every celebration of the Eucharist is the marriage [feast] of heaven and earth!” (Bob Wester, Director of Liturgy). Remember, Christ himself, the Holy Eucharist, is “Bread from Heaven.” Through our participation, a mystical exchange, a mystical marriage, takes place: “We come to share in the divinity of Jesus Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity” (Words proclaimed by the priest as he drops some water into the wine for Mass). We attain a spiritual mountain, the realm of God. And “On this mountain ... he will destroy death forever. The Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from every face; the reproach of his people he will remove from the whole earth.” As Christ declares, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28). This is the reason for offering the Masses for our different intentions. Ultimately, Christ will give us “juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines”; that is, fullness of peace, joy, happiness, and abundant life. We will attain the full and eternal beatific vision of God and proclaim: “Behold our God, to whom we looked to save us!” Indeed, “I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life” (Words of our Responsorial Psalm, 23: 1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6). What a blessed hope! What a blessed assurance!

All people should be zealous to respond to God’s generous invitation by attending Mass, at least, on Sundays. God declares, “Summon the invited guests to the feast.... Behold, I have prepared my banquet... and everything is ready; come to the feast.” Unfortunately, like many invitees in the Gospel who declined, many people today turn down God’s invitation. They always have an excuse why it is not possible for them to go to Church: Some “ignore” the invitation;

some go to “farm”, others to their “business” [golf, dining, recreation, work, etc]. Some even “mistreat” Christians and attempt to destroy the Church. What a shame! Beloved, let us never be like these people; please, always long for the opportunity to celebrate with the Lord. Christ says, “Do not labor for the food [or things] which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal” (John 6:27).

Furthermore, it is not enough to attend Mass; we must be actively engaged in the celebration. Our bulletin insert states, “The participation of each person in the Liturgy is important”, according to the approved norms and roles; else it will amount to appearing before the Lord “*without a wedding garment*.” “Bishops and priests... act... in the very person of Christ, on behalf of his people.... A bishop has the added responsibility of being the chief shepherd, the principal liturgist of his diocese in his role as the successor of the Apostles.... In the celebration of the Mass, deacons proclaim the Gospel, occasionally preach the homily, and assist the bishop and priest in exercising their sacred duties. In addition to the ordained ministries, some roles in the Liturgy are exercised by lay people who place their time and talent at the service of the liturgical assembly as acolytes (altar servers), lectors, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, cantors, choir members, instrumentalists, ... ushers, [liturgy directors, sacristans, etc].”

All liturgical roles are to be maintained and respected: “For example, if a deacon is present, the priest celebrant or a concelebrant should not read the Gospel. The lector should not take on the role of a server or an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion.” Also, the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion should yield his or her place to a priest or deacon, if there are enough priests or deacons to distribute Holy Communion. “Those who come together for Liturgy do not have the luxury of acting as spectators, waiting for all to be done for them. ‘Full, conscious, and active participation’ in the Liturgy (as commended by the Second Vatican Council) is not only their right but also their duty and their responsibility.... [On the whole], ‘Participation’ does not refer primarily to external activity or function during the celebration of Mass; rather, it refers to a deeply spiritual, interior participation of mind and heart, filled with devotion and penetrating the very depths of the mysteries we celebrate.” This is evident in the way we welcome and treat each person with dignity, reverence, and love. Finally, in the words of St. Paul in our Second Reading (Phil 4:12-14, 19-20), we pray God will fully supply whatever ... [we] need, in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” Amen.