

Introductory remarks

The theme of liturgy, that of public divine worship, contains within itself the fundamental truth about the true purpose of all creation. All creation was created by God the Creator for the primary purpose of glorifying him through the most excellent act of religion: worship. The world was created for the glory of God (cf. First Vatican Council, *Dei Filius*, can. 5). Saint Bonaventure explains that God created all things not to increase his glory, but to manifest it and communicate it to creatures (cf. *In II Sent.* I, 2, 2, 1).

The primary purpose of Holy Mass is the worship of God, not the feeling of belonging to a community. Divine revelation teaches us that worship means recognising that God is God and that we are creatures. This is the fundamental attitude of worship as taught by divine revelation and Holy Scripture, for the most dangerous temptation for creatures is to make themselves gods, to substitute themselves for God. Such was the sin of the fallen angels, who sinned before man. Satan refused to worship God, the one who is *solus Sanctus, solus Dominus, solus Altissimus*, as we proclaim in the *Gloria* of the Holy Mass. St Thomas Aquinas states: "Thus it is with sins against God; (...) among them there is one of supreme gravity, which is to render divine honours to a creature" (*Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 94, art. 3).

Adoration is the first attitude of man who recognises himself as a creature before his Creator. St Thomas explains that worship or adoration comprises both internal and external acts, because of our dual nature: "As St John Damascene says (De Fide Orth. 4, 12), 'Because we are composed of two natures, intellectual and sensitive, we offer God a double adoration'. One is spiritual and consists in the intimate devotion of the spirit; the other is bodily because it consists in the external lowering of the body. Because, in all acts of religion, the exterior is relative to the interior as to what is at the beginning, external worship is done with a view to interior worship. The signs of humility presented by the body excite our hearts to submit to God, the sensible being for us the natural means of accessing the intelligible." (*Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 84, art. 2).

We read in the book of the prophet Isaiah (VI, 1-4): "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above the throne were seraphim, each with six wings: with two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. They called to one another and said, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory. The doorposts were shaken by the sound of their voices, and the house was filled with smoke.'"

The external act of adoration also expresses the humility of the creature. It professes its total dependence on God. St. Thomas expresses it this way: "External adoration is done with a view to internal adoration. The signs of humility presented by the body excite our hearts to submit to God. In the same way, St. Thomas explains the spiritual meaning of the act of genuflection: "Thus, by bending the knee, we express our weakness before God; prostrating ourselves, we protest that we are nothing ourselves." (*Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 84, art. 2, ad 2).

The Catholic philosopher Dietrich von Hildebrand, known as "the Doctor of the Church of the Twentieth Century" by Pope Pius XII, stated: "The entire liturgy is imbued with reverential fear before the *majestas Domini*, a clear awareness of His absolute sovereignty and the recognition that everything comes from Him. And yet there is no room here for the slightest Jansenist or Calvinist note of distance from God, of crushing awe in the face of His greatness, or of destructive contempt for ourselves. On the contrary, it is the spirit that presides over the verse '*Introibo ad altare Dei, ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam*' – I will go to the altar of God, to God who gladdens my youth. (...) See the intensity of this spirit of fear and respect in the prefaces and the Sanctus! Fear linked at the same time to the awareness that we are children of God" (*Liturgie et personnalité*, Geneva, Ad Solem, 2008, 64).

The fruit of adoration is inner silence. In the liturgy, it is essential to look with our eyes and with our hearts, loving God. That is why our eternal happiness will be called the beatific vision [*visio beatifica*], and not the beatific thought [*cogitatio beatifica*]. Clearly, this is also given to us in the extraordinary form of the Roman rite, with the silence that envelops the moments of consecration. Our Orthodox and Greek Catholic brothers have very striking gestures of adoration: they bow deeply, or kneel and touch the ground with their heads. Everything is imbued with exquisite expressiveness.

Unfortunately, liturgical reform has drastically reduced the number of these visible gestures of worship. The Church has a rich history spanning two thousand years, whereas we have only known the New Order for about fifty years. Usually, crises in the Church have lasted about seventy years, such as the Babylonian exile in the Old Testament, or the Avignon exile in France in the 14th century. We are currently going through a time of liturgical exile. Divine Providence will surely intervene, granting us a hierarchy that knows how to repair the liturgy according to the *sensus perennis* of the Church's tradition. The new rite will then be increasingly brought back to the traditional liturgical form of the Church, approaching the traditional form of the Mass. There will be no mixing, but the two forms will be very similar. We may not see this in our lifetime, but we will see the eternal liturgy, which will certainly be even more beautiful.

Blessed Ildefonso Schuster, Cardinal Archbishop of Milan (+1954), observed: "The ecclesiastical spirit, especially in the field of liturgy, which for the faithful is part of their catechism, abhors this itch for novelty that so appeals to the world. At any sign of innovation, simple and pious souls are troubled, as if the edifice of their faith, fortified by the wall of centuries-old tradition, were falling into ruin. To pray to God with the same formulas composed by the Fathers, to recite the same songs that comforted them in their sorrows and struggles for the Church, means to enter more intimately into their piety, to be in solidarity with their hopes and ideals." (*Liber Sacramentorum*, Volume III (Second Sunday of Lent), Brussels, 100).

Liturgical rites must always express this aspect of creation, namely order and beauty, which in turn communicate harmony and peace. Liturgical rites authentically radiate peace, harmony and beauty. In the writings of Blessed Ivan Merz, we read: "The prayers and gestures of the liturgy, its melodies and fragrances, are the projection of Heaven on earth and a snapshot of God's inner life." (cf. www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20030622_merz_en.html).

Cardinal Giovanni Bona, an eminent liturgical scholar of the 17th century, stated: "Ceremonies contain no perfection or holiness in themselves, yet they are external acts of religion, and through their meaning they stimulate the soul to veneration of the sacred, elevate the spirit to supernatural realities, nourish piety, foster charity, increase faith, strengthen devotion, instruct simple souls, adorn the worship of God, preserve religion, and distinguish true Christians from false and heterodox ones" (*De divina psalmodia*, c. 19, par. 3, 1). At a time when the sacred and the profane were readily mixed, as in the era of the Renaissance popes, Cardinal Egidio da Viterbo uttered these memorable words during the inaugural prayer of the Fifth Lateran Council in 1512: "It is men who must be changed by sacred things, and not sacred things by men" (*homines per sacra immutari fas est, non sacra per homines*).

Through its rites, Holy Mass expresses stability and continuity. Dietrich von Hildebrand rightly observed: "The Liturgy, more than anything else, is imbued with the spirit of continuity, and allows those who live in it to participate in it. (...) The frequent repetitions found in the liturgy, which some consider useless and burdensome, are precisely a testimony to continuity. (...) With the liturgy, we are immersed in the world of eternity, a world where there is no place for ordinary or sensational novelties. The unchanging splendour of God's eternal beauty and holiness, the eternally new gentleness of the God-man, are always equally timely, always equally relevant." (*Liturgy and Personality*, 140-141).

May these enlightening words of Fr. Nicholas Gehr encourage us to rediscover the centrality of the worship of God in the liturgy, and to restore it with the greatest possible dignity: "The

Eucharistic sacrifice is, as we have just shown, the most holy and sublime action of the Christian religion, divine worship par excellence; it is the sun, the heart of the supernatural life of grace, the source of all perfection and holiness; it is the supreme good, the greatest treasure, the most precious wealth of the Church: we must therefore expect to see this glorious Bride of Jesus Christ employ all her care and solicitude to celebrate it in the most worthy manner possible. Jesus Christ instituted only the substance, the essential act of sacrifice; he left it to his Church, aided and guided by the Holy Spirit, to develop and clothe in some way the simple but effective action of consecration. The sublime rites, so apt to lift up our souls, with which this Church, endowed with the omnipotence of Jesus Christ and with his assistance, has surrounded the sacrifice, are not a mere human product: they are a masterpiece created with God's help, a sacred construction so beautiful, so harmonious, so admirable, so perfect in its entirety as in its various parts, that one cannot fail to recognise the invisible hand that took part in its design and execution. (*The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, its dogmatic, liturgical and ascetic explanation*, 2nd revised edition, Paris Éd. Lethielleux, 1900-1901, translated by Abbé L.-Th. Moccand, 249)

This volume of proceedings from the 2025 Colloquium of the International Centre for Liturgical Studies, edited by Rubén Peretó Rivas, with the eloquent title "Heaven on Earth ", contains extremely valuable contributions from liturgical experts who make a significant and effective contribution to the main goal of the true renewal of the liturgical life of the Church in our time, which consists in what the Second Vatican Council indicated, namely, to manifest "the mystery of Christ and the authentic nature of the true Church. ... But in such a way that in her what is human is ordered and subject to the divine; what is visible to the invisible; what pertains to action to contemplation; and what is present to the future city we seek (cf. Heb 13:14). Also, since the liturgy builds up those who are within it every day to make them a holy temple in the Lord, a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (cf. Eph 2:21-22), until they reach the stature of the fullness of Christ (ibid., 4:13)" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 2).

I highly recommend reading these valuable contributions to the sacred liturgy. May they not only serve to convey to readers a true understanding of the nature of the liturgy and a love for it, but also find an echo among the pastors of the Church, and first and foremost among the Supreme Pastor of the Church, the Supreme Pontiff, so that the much-desired and urgent work of restoring the liturgy of the Holy Mass to its dignity and beauty, in accordance with the *perennis sensus ecclesiae*, may be accomplished.

14 September 2025, Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross
+ Athanasius Schneider, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of St. Mary in Astana

