

Sermon by Msg. Wladimir-Marie de Saint-Jean

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The theme chosen for this year's symposium is of particular importance.

Indeed, is there any task more necessary or more urgent than striving to shed light, in its various aspects, on the essential link uniting liturgy and faith?

Is not our Western world – to speak only of it – being subjected to the crushing force of materialism? Do we not see here the fulfilment of the Scripture's words that "the Spirit Himself has become flesh"?

The true powers—which are not always the most obvious—that inspire and direct our societies have resolved to stupefy the people through religious indifference; they know they cannot succeed in this without, at the same time, stripping them of that sense of and practice of the sacred, without which, deprived of their true dignity that makes them 'capable of GOD', people will be reduced to a herd that can be led by a few slogans, uniformly and globally hammered home across audio and visual media.

What, then, could be more relevant, what more 'modern', than striving to know and practise the faith and the liturgy ever more fully—not only each in its own right, but also in their relationship and connection, which is as necessary as it is inevitable?

The liturgy, "*that integral public worship of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, Head and members*" (Pius XII: *Mediator Dei et hominum*), because it is wholly imbued with the treasure of the faith and expresses it adequately, is therefore also an authentic "theological source", as well as a great and exalted school of the faith.

"The variety and splendour of liturgical ceremonies abundantly imbue the human person with divine teachings, transforming them into lifeblood, and making them serve the progress of their spiritual life".

Such praise owes nothing to rhetorical flourish; in the words of Pope Pius XI, it is an affirmation of the Magisterium.

"To instil in the people the truths of the faith and thus raise them to the joys of the inner life, the annual solemnities of the liturgical feasts are far more effective than any documents, even the most weighty, of the ecclesiastical Magisterium".

It is the same Pontiff, in the same encyclical *Quas Primas*, who has just spoken to us once more; and we cannot help but note the bold force of his comparison between the most official documents and the Liturgy.

This serene boldness, however, does not draw its strength from any novelty. Tradition – never old nor obsolete – imparts to it its ever-youthful relevance.

Speaking in his day on the subject of the liturgy, Pope Benedict XIV put it this way: “*The law of faith and that of prayer are perfectly in harmony with one another*”, and the Pontiff quoted the much older letter from Saint Celestine to the Bishops of Gaul: “Let us also pay attention to the mysteries of the priestly prayers, so that the law of prayer may establish the law of faith” (Encyclical *Quemad modum preces*, 23 March 1743).

This is also what Blessed Pius IX would write in his Encyclical *Omnem sollicitudinem* (13 May 1874 to the Ruthenians): “*A very close bond unites and links liturgical discipline to dogma*”.

But it is of the utmost importance here not to create confusion, and not to reverse the meaning of the famous and very apt formula “*Legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*”.

Such confusion and reversal, with fatal consequences, would inevitably arise if one were to regard the liturgy as a field of experimentation with truths that ought to be held as matters of faith. In that case, a particular rite and its circumstantial fruitfulness would precede and then establish the rule of faith. This cannot be true. On the contrary, the liturgy constitutes a ‘*continuous profession of the Catholic faith*’, in the words of Saint Augustine: ‘*Fide, spe, caritate colendum Deum*’ (P.L. XL, 232).

This is what Pope Pius XII taught most aptly – and, might one say, prophetically – when, after endorsing the view that the Liturgy establishes the rule of belief, he wrote: “*the Liturgy does not, however, establish the Catholic faith in an absolute manner and by its own authority, but rather because it is a profession of heavenly truths subject to the supreme Magisterium of the Church, and can thus provide arguments and testimonies of great value in deciding a particular point of Christian doctrine*”.

And the Pope set out the following principle, the force and clarity of which are of particular interest and serve to illustrate the theme of this symposium:

“*If one wishes to discern and determine, in an absolute and general manner, the relationship between faith and the Liturgy, one may rightly say: Lex credendi legem statuit supplicandi*”

It is therefore indeed the constituent elements of the sacred deposit of the faith – understood in accordance with the *Commonitorium* of Saint Vincent of Lerins – that the liturgy is bound to profess, employing for this purpose a ritual framework that is appropriate to each of them as well as to the whole, in accordance with the proportions of an intelligent and harmonious balance.

Instructing the entire body of the faithful with the remarkable force and clarity conferred upon it by its annual repetition, the liturgy, in each and every one of its rites and ceremonies, must always and above all be imbued with an unquestionably and profoundly sacred dimension.

As everyone here is well aware, His Holiness John Paul II has just reiterated this in his recent address to the *Plenaria* of the Congregation for Divine Worship.

For the sacred Liturgy is neither our private property nor a free arena for personal experiments proposed or imposed upon the faithful in place of the authentic public worship of Mother Church. For us priests in particular, the Liturgy is a service—a service most noble of all, certainly, but, thank God, governed by indispensable rules.

And let us be careful not to label as *rubricism* the precise—and therefore loving—observance of these laws, the establishment of which constitutes one of the most sacred rights, but also duties, of the supreme authority of the Church. Is this not what Pope John XXIII recalled in his Apostolic Letter “*Jude a primis*” of 30 June 1960: ?

“The development of liturgical piety in the Church goes hand in hand with that of faith itself as regards a fuller knowledge of divine truths”.

And the Roman Pontiff clearly highlighted the logical and salutary consequence of this. These developments, he continued, “in order to appear perfectly in keeping with the Catholic faith and to be able to spread throughout the universal Church, require the intervention of the authority of the Chair of Peter”.

The faith of the Church...

For us here at this symposium, the stakes are nothing less than that. The faith of the Church—that divine deposit, infallibly preserved and faithfully handed down by virtue of an immortal tradition; that sacred deposit entrusted to the apostolic age so that our own age might also live by it, infusing it with the joyful and steadfast hope contained in the promise of ‘the goods to come’.

The faith, the life-giving faith of the Church, which we humbly yet fully uphold—it is this, then, that we are endeavouring in these days to explore more deeply, to admire, and to love within the sphere of its expression and its privileged realisation, to which tradition cannot cease to confer, today as in the past, its ‘seal of distinction’: The Holy Liturgy.