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LITURGY AND THE EUCHARIST IN LIGHT OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION[1]

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Clarification of Terms

First we need to clarify what we mean by "new evangelization." When we say "new evangelization," we mean the process of transmitting Christ's message of salvation in today's world.[2] This process is not as simple as it sounds. First of all, there is a need to clarify what Christ's message of salvation is; second, there is also a need to clarify what the world of today is.

[1]From a talk given at the First Philippine Congress on New Evangelization (University of Santo Tomás, Manila: October 17, 2013).

[2]Pope St. John Paul II first used the term in 1985 in an address to Latin American bishops. A clearer definition may be found in John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* 33. For Pope Benedict XVI, the new evangelization is focused on "re-proposing" the Gospel to those who have experienced a crisis of faith. He called for the re-proposing of the Gospel "to those regions awaiting the first evangelization and to those regions where the roots of Christianity are deep but who have experienced a serious crisis of faith due to secularization" ("Homily of First Vespers on the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul," http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100628_vespri-pietro-paolo_en.html [accessed Sept. 8, 2015]). In other words, the new evangelization invites each Catholic to renew their relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church.

Christ's message of salvation remains unchanged ever since it was first proclaimed. Pope John Paul II says that evangelization cannot be new in its content since its very theme is always the one gospel given in Jesus Christ.[3] By evangelization the Church means most fundamentally the proclamation of the basic Christian message: salvation through Jesus Christ.[4] On this foundation of the basic message of eternal life in God, John Paul II extends the notion of evangelization. Briefly, therefore, the message is this: God's love for us, His human creatures, is so great that He did not hesitate to send His Only-Begotten Son to lead us, lost humanity, back to Him by redeeming us from slavery to sin and the power of Satan. This He did through the Incarnation and the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ His Son (His Paschal Mystery), and in the process restored back the shattered dignity of humanity as God's children. This salvation won for us by Jesus Christ is offered to those willing to accept this message of salvation. This message, which has been entrusted to the Church, is what she has always proclaimed from the earliest times.

It is in this context of the new evangelization that we treat the topics of liturgy and Eucharist, for the liturgy and the Eucharist are apt vehicles for proclaiming this message of salvation through Jesus Christ. Take away the Eucharist and liturgy and the Church will cease to exist. As John Paul II's encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* says, "the Eucharist builds the Church, and the Church makes the Eucharist."[5]

Today's world to which the Church must proclaim this message of Christ has changed much since the first proclamation was made. Today's world has been greatly affected by secularization, and the process of secularization has produced a serious crisis in the sense of the Christian faith and the role of the Church. Secularization is the transformation of a society from close identification with religious values and institutions towards identification with non-religious (or

[3]John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 29.

[4]Cf. Rom. 6:23.

[5]John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 26.

irreligious) values and secular institutions. The *secularization thesis* refers to the belief that as societies progress, particularly through modernization and rationalization, religion loses its authority in all aspects of social life and governance. Even in places where the Church has long existed—mainly in Europe—secularization has surreptitiously crept in, and even in traditionally Catholic and Christian cultures there is now a felt need to "promote a renewed evangelisation" due to the progressive secularization of society and a sort of "eclipse of the sense of God."[6]

Secularization is further aggravated by the dictatorship of relativism "that does not recognize anything as definitive, and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires."[7] This pretty much describes our world today, and it is to this secularized, relativistic world that the Gospel of Christ needs to be proclaimed anew.

Having thus defined what we mean by "new evangelization," let us now look at the topic at hand: Eucharist and liturgy in the light of the new evangelization.

Dialogue
(Personal Experiences and Pastoral Practice)

Vatican II tells us that liturgy is the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed, and at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows.[8] This image of the liturgy as the source and summit is re-echoed in the Council's description of the

[6]Pippa Norris & Ronald Inglehart, "The Secularization Debate," in *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge/New York/Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2004), chapter 1.

[7]Joseph Ratzinger, Homily at the Mass for the Election of the Supreme Pontiff (St. Peter's Basilica: April 18, 2005). Cf. Benedict XVI, *Light of the World: A Conversation with Peter Seewald* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 50ff.

[8]*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 10.

Eucharist as the source and summit of Christian life.[9] Indeed, this so close as to be almost interchangeable association between liturgy and the Eucharist is seen in the Constitution on the Liturgy which says that the liturgy "'through which the work of our redemption is accomplished,' most of all in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, is the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church."[10]

Today, the topic of the liturgy and the Holy Mass is one that is very much alive and of great concern to practically all Catholics of all stripes—from the archconservative type to the most liberal. If one seeks a lively discussion of Church concerns, assign liturgy and the Eucharist as the topic for discussion, and one is sure to elicit passionate responses from participants. This is an indication of the great interest this topic has for us Catholics.

All of us could relate to a feeling of encounter with God in the celebration of the Holy Mass. We presume that feeling to be one of a calming, embracing love of God which sustains us in our daily lives and leaves a mark on us.

In my experience as a priest, there are a lot of variables which are important to having a dignified celebration of the Mass. I personally find that the most important of all is the *internal* or *interior disposition* of the individual—whether one is a priest, a lay liturgical minister, or simply an ordinary Mass-goer. What I refer to here is the attitude of mind and heart of both priest and people.

When I as a priest celebrate the Mass—from vesting to actual presiding—what is my disposition, what is my attitude? Do I interiorly withdraw to myself and pray for worthiness to offer the Sacrifice, or do I just rush in from a previous activity and put on my vestments nonchalantly as if I were putting on a new shirt, not paying much attention to the importance of the rite I am about to lead? Do I reflect

[9] *Lumen Gentium* 11; Catechism of the Catholic Church 1324.

[10] *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 2.

and pray on God's word which I am about to proclaim? In other words, the *ars celebrandi*, the proper celebration of the liturgical rites, is greatly affected by the interior disposition of the priest.[11]

As an ordinary Mass-goer, what is my disposition, what is my attitude? Do I prepare myself interiorly, do I recollect myself, as I get ready for Mass from the house, on the way, and when I get to church? Am I actively involved, interiorly disposed, to participate in the liturgical action unfolding before my eyes?[12] Or do I engage in distractions, idle talk, even criticism and gossip as I meet friends and acquaintances, or tinker with my mobile phone or tablet, or let my thoughts fly to some not-so-holy thoughts? Is my attitude one of arrogance, of looking down at others who do not know how to behave well during worship time in church? There are a myriad of examples of attitudes and dispositions we assume when we go to church.

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[11] *Ars celebrandi* involves: 1) fidelity to the texts and rubrics of the liturgical rite; 2) prayerful understanding of the liturgical texts, feasts, and seasons; 3) reverent sense of the priest and other ministers as well as of the faithful who are engaged in a dialogue of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and 4) proper preparation for celebrating the liturgical rite.

[12] *Actuosa participatio* (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 11 and 14) does not mean that everyone must sing everything, carry stuff, clap their hands, etc. What the Council really wanted was first and foremost a lively interior and spiritual participation and, as a result of that, an outward expression of participation. "*Actuosa*" conveys a more interior sense. "The real action in the liturgy in which we are all supposed to participate is the action of God Himself. This is what is new and distinctive about the Catholic liturgy: God Himself acts and does what is essential" (Benedict XVI, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000], 173). This kind of participation in the very action of Christ the High Priest requires from us nothing less than an attitude of being totally absorbed in him. "The point is that, ultimately, the difference between the *actio Christi* and our own action is done away with. There is only one action, which is at the same time His and ours—ours because we have become one body and one spirit 'with Him'" (Benedict XVI, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 174). *Actuosa participatio,* thus, is not giving way to any activism but an integral and total assimilation into the person of Jesus Christ, who is truly the High Priest of that eternal and uninterrupted celebration of the heavenly liturgy.

There are also people who go out of their way, even far from their parishes, to look for a priest whose celebration of the Holy Mass would inspire them, and here we do not mean the homily alone. It is the way the Holy Mass is celebrated: solemn and dignified in its simplicity, with soul, as it were, and where the sense of God is palpable.

Certainly the interior disposition of a validly ordained priest has no bearing on the efficacy of the Eucharist. As long as it is validly celebrated, the Eucharist is efficacious (has an effect) on those who attend Mass and receive Holy Communion. However, it would be preferable if the priest is in the state of grace when he celebrates the Holy Mass. His internal disposition is of utmost importance for the Mass-goers to encounter God. He sets the tone, as it were. That there are people willing to drive as much as an hour just to hear Mass should be a wake up call to our priests.

Another important aspect to consider is the internal or interior disposition of lay liturgical ministers.[13] It is a fact that a good number of priests celebrate the Mass more solemnly because of the manner in which their master of ceremonies assists them in the smooth flow of the celebration. Also, the interior disposition of the lector affects how he or she proclaims God's word in Scripture, and this is felt by Mass-goers. This goes beyond mere technicalities like correct diction, cadence in reading, and eye contact; body language, which is largely symbolic, plays an important role in communicating God's word from one's heart. The attitude and interior disposition of the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion is made manifest in the manner by which he handles the Body of Christ: is he reverent and deferential in his approach, knowing that he holds God in his hands, or does he distribute Communion as if he were distributing candies or coins to the communicant?

Lastly, the interior disposition of the church-goer is also important in the encounter with God that takes place at the Holy Mass. Do we try to immerse ourselves in the mystery unfolding before us at Mass, or are we distracted by the many goings-on around us that our

[13] *Redemptionis Sacramentum* 43–46.

religious activity is no different from our sitting around at the mall or waiting for a show to begin? Is our Mass-going an opportunity to update ourselves about the latest gossip, or a preparation for a good lunch or supper after Mass?

Many of us here may be wondering why we bring up this matter of interior attitude and disposition. The obvious reason is that for a very large majority of Mass-going Catholics, the only experience they have with the Church or even any faith group is the Holy Mass. It is also this very large majority that we are being called and challenged to re-evangelize. They are among those whose sense of God has been eclipsed by the rapid secularization of today's culture.[14]

Discern
(Input Grounded on Scriptures and Church Teaching)

When we talk about the Eucharist and liturgy as "source and summit" of Christian life and the activity of the Church, we find that the reality hardly corresponds with the ideal, that the *what is* does not correspond with the *what should be*. Why is this so? Most probably it is because we do not know or understand the reason why we celebrate the Eucharist and liturgy, or even if we do know, we have lost appreciation for the celebration because it has become all-too-familiar to us. Thus, it will be beneficial for us to understand or be reminded once more why we celebrate the liturgy, and the Eucharist in particular.

Vatican II in its Constitution on Sacred Liturgy tells us that liturgy is part of salvation history.[15] It considers liturgy not just as a simple

[14] *Redemptoris Missio* 33: "Thirdly, there is an intermediate situation, particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger Churches as well, where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. In this case what is needed is a 'new evangelization' or a 're-evangelization.'"

[15] *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 5.

ritual celebration governed by rules and norms but as part of God's self-disclosure or encounter with us. This self-disclosure or encounter with us takes place in a series of events which reveals God's plan of salvation for humanity.

After the fall of our first parents and our subsequent slavery to sin, God drew a plan to save us and restore to us our lost dignity as His children. God promised to send a Messiah to redeem us, and called ancient Israel to be His chosen people from whom the Redeemer would arise.

Since Old Testament times, God has announced this plan in words and deeds through the patriarchs and the prophets. The Exodus event, when the angel of death spared the first-born of Israel from death through the blood of the paschal lamb, and when Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, prefigured our own liberation from slavery to sin. This significant event of liberation in the Old Testament is called the Passover or the ancient Pasch that prefigured a much greater passing over that was to come.

When the fullness of time came, God sent His Only-Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to fulfil His promise of salvation. He took flesh from the Virgin Mary. With the Incarnation, salvation entered into the world, and was finally accomplished with the Death-Resurrection-Ascension of Christ (the Paschal Mystery). And so the Passover of Christ, or the reality of the redemption accomplished by Christ, is at the center of salvation history and of liturgy.[16]

Salvation history did not end with Pentecost. It is still taking place up to our time. God in Jesus Christ continues to save us. We are assured of this ongoing salvation because Jesus Christ did not leave us, His Church, as orphans. He promised to remain and be present with us until the end of time. Vatican II teaches us that our Lord's presence in the liturgy is fourfold: 1) in the Sacrifice of the Mass—in the priest and in the sacrament as Victim (sacrament) and as the One who offers (Christ as the Eternal Priest); 2) in the celebration of the sacraments, because in them it is Christ who acts; 3) in the word proclaimed in the

[16] *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 6.

community of the Church; and 4) in common prayer, because Christ is always present among those who gather in His name. Relying on His assurance, the Church celebrates the salvation offered by God through the Paschal Mystery of her Redeemer in the liturgy, particularly in the Eucharist.[17]

Because of Christ's presence in the liturgy, we encounter His Paschal Mystery, and participate in the various saving moments of the total Passover of Christ. Through the Paschal Mystery we are reborn in Baptism as children of God (Rom. 6:3–4); the Spirit is given us in Confirmation (Acts 2:8; 2:33); we share in the sacrifice of Christ and the highest point of the Passover is communicated to us in the Eucharist (Lk. 22:19–20); and the Spirit given us after the Resurrection makes possible the sacrament of Penance (Jn. 20:22–23). For this reason, all the sacraments, while giving each one a share in the particular aspect of the total mystery of Christ, are in some way linked to the Eucharist, which is the center and summit of the Paschal Mystery. Because of this, every event in the life of Christ—from His Birth to His Ascension, to the Pentecost and the end of the ages—is celebrated and communicated in the Paschal Mystery of the death of the Lord (Holy Mass) in the course of the liturgical year. Liturgy, therefore, essentially tends to make us live the salvation-Paschal Mystery in its singular moments, and it does this by accomplishing in us the Paschal Mystery taken in its highest moment: the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. God's salvific action through Christ thus still continues in the Church, and we continue to be saved and to experience this salvation every time we celebrate the liturgy and the Eucharist. This is the truth that today's secularized culture needs to hear and experience.

In the face of this reality of God in Jesus Christ actively saving us each time we celebrate the Eucharist and the liturgy, how can we ignore or lose sight of this great gift of salvation that we receive? How can we be indifferent to the action of God who reaches out to us in the Eucharist as He gives us His own Body and Blood to give us life? Should not our response be one of gratitude and thanksgiving, of awe and wonder at this wondrous gift?

[17] *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7.

Deeds
(Pastoral Recommendations and Pastoral Application)

Given the present situation that warrants the new evangelization, there is serious need for liturgical catechesis and formation of the laity, especially those who are directly involved in liturgical animation and altar service. It is through catechesis and formation that the laity will be able to participate truly, fully, consciously, and actively in the liturgy.[18]

There is also a need for the empowerment of existing avenues of evangelization, with correct basic theological training for leaders so as to ensure orthodoxy in their praiseworthy attempts to grow in the faith and transmit and communicate that faith to others.

And lastly, for all of us—and perhaps this is the most important—we need a change of attitude about the celebration of the Eucharist. The Holy Mass is not a show, a spectacle to entertain us. If this is our attitude, then our focus is on ourselves—"self-referential," as Pope Francis calls it.[19] Let us not seek to be entertained at Mass, as it were, to "enjoy" it. The Holy Mass is not about us; it is about God. The focus is on God, not on us; we love Him, we worship Him, we adore Him. It is important, therefore, to examine ourselves: do I really love God?

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[18]Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* 85 (August 11, 1997).

[19]In a pre-conclave meeting, Jorge Bergoglio gave a short speech which impressed the cardinals and probably got him elected as Pope. He said:

> When the Church does not come out of herself to evangelize, she becomes self-referential …. The evils that, over time, happen in ecclesial institutions have their root in self-referentiality and a kind of theological narcissism. … When the Church is self-referential, inadvertently, she believes she has her own light; she ceases to be the *mysterium lunae* … reflecting the light of Christ … [She] gives way to that very serious evil, spiritual worldliness …. It lives to give glory only to one another.

For the full text, see http://www.catholic.com/blog/jimmy-akin/the-4-minute-speech-that-got-pope-francis-elected (accessed December 3, 2013).

Do I really love Christ? If our answer is "yes," it will not be difficult for us to accept the Holy Mass as an act of love, worship, and adoration. We will not deem it an obligation to be complied with, but rather as an opportunity to give thanks together with the Christian community. It will not be seen and experienced as "dry" and "boring" because we understand that there is a great mystery being accomplished during the celebration of the Mass, and this great mystery is our salvation being accomplished by God in the Lord Jesus Christ.