

Fifth Sunday Per Annum (A)
February 9, 2014.

O come, let us worship God and bow low before the God who made us, for He is the Lord our God (Introit; Ps. 94:6-7).

In what is known as the Divine Office or the Liturgy of the Hours, the official set of daily prayers prescribed by the Church, all those who recite these prayers, whether in monasteries or religious houses or alone in private recitation, begin with the recitation of Psalm 95 from which is taken the entrance Antiphon (*Introit*) of our Mass: *Come, let us sing to the Lord and shout with joy to the rock who saves us. Let us approach Him with praise and thanksgiving and sing joyful songs to the Lord.... O come, then, let us bow low and worship, bending the knee before the Lord, our maker. For he is our God and we are His people, the flock He shepherds.* All of these sentiments mark our prayer during the course of the Christian day and most especially, during the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass: joy and exultation, praise and humble adoration, weeping before the Lord, sometimes in sorrow for our sins, sometimes in the joy of His redeeming grace.

Yes, we are His people in two ways and so the Psalm gives a double reason for our worship: creation and election. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that *adoration is the first act of the virtue of religion. To adore God is to acknowledge Him as God, as the Creator and Saviour, the Lord and Master of everything that exists, as infinite merciful Love* (# 2096). Our worship is rooted in our identity as the Chosen People of God. The Apostle Paul declares: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him* (Eph. 1:3-4). Our worship which rests on who we are by reason of our election has a twofold purpose: *the worship of God, and our transformation in Christ.* This transformation is brought about by our drawing closer to His goodness and growing in likeness to Him. This is the effect of our worship.

Our election however is not to be understood as a guarantee of salvation, for the Psalmist exhorts us to vigilance, should memory fade and heart be hardened: *Today, listen to the voice of the Lord: Do not grow stubborn, as your fathers did in the wilderness.* The psalm contains an explicit and real warning, a warning born of bitter historical memory. What happened in the desert to Israel of old can also happen *today*. The day of decision is always *today*. This is the point of the earliest Christian interpretation of this psalm found in the Epistle to the Hebrews, a work addressed to a Christian congregation which, the author feared, was in serious danger of falling away from the faith. *Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it called 'today', that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end.* (Heb. 3:12-14). The Psalmist's warning is always a matter of *today*, whether at the beginning of our daily worship or as we assist at the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. So we must ask ourselves; what dispositions do we bring to prayer? Have we allowed our hearts to harden and to grow cold through indifference and mediocrity in relation to the things of God? These questions are always relevant; and in our times, more so than ever relevant.

God must be worshipped in the beauty of holiness and the holiness of beauty, with a spirit of deepest reverence. This is especially true of the worship given to God in the Holy Sacrifice of the

Mass. In his last encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Blessed John Paul II reminded us that *like the woman who anointed Jesus in Bethany, the Church has feared no 'extravagance,' devoting the best of her resources to expressing her wonder and adoration before the unsurpassable gift of the Eucharist. ... [T]he faith of the Church in the mystery of the Eucharist has found historical expression not only in the demand for an interior disposition of devotion, but also in outward forms meant to evoke and emphasize the grandeur of the event being celebrated.* (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, April 17, 2003).

In the bi-millennial tradition of the Church the desire to offer our Lord Jesus Christ affection and honour in the Mass, especially at Holy Communion may be summarised in this manner. The first thousand years may be characterised by this phrase; *cum amore et timore; with love and fear*. So great is the Mystery that the word *fear* expresses awe and profound reverence. The second thousand years, by this phrase taken from the *Lauda Sion*, a Eucharistic hymn composed by St. Thomas Aquinas: *quantum potes, tantum aude; do as much as you can*. Fused into one single statement, ideally this should characterise our liturgical and devotional attitude during this, the third millennium of the Church's existence: *With love and fear, do as much as you can*. It would seem however, that the opposite is true. In the aftermath of what can only be described as a liturgical revolution, generally speaking, our attitude toward the things of God has become one of minimalism, wretched minimalism at that. This has not been without consequence for the sacred liturgy is the pre-eminent means through which we receive proper religious formation and education in virtue. *The worship of the one God sets man free from turning in on himself, from the slavery of sin and the idolatry of the world* (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, # 2097). Personal prayer, evangelization and the works of mercy – all of which are needed and all of which are to be exercised by each member of the Church – these derive their very meaning from the liturgy. The Second Vatican Council taught us that *every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the priest and of His Body which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others; no other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree* (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7; December 4, 1963).

It is undeniable however, that we have undergone and are still experiencing a liturgical crisis. Our modern liturgical praxis is evidently a break with tradition. In times of crisis, whether they are personal or those of a community, what is most surely needed is a return to the sources with love and intelligence and discernment. Perhaps this is why God has allowed such a grave crisis to afflict us; so that we might return to the Lord and cling to Him (Cf. *1Tim. 1:19*) alone. If our liturgical celebrations are not principally an expression and experience of adoration, then they can become a hindrance to our union with Christ our Lord. Though this may sound improbable to some, the renewal of our times depends greatly on the renewed appreciation of the importance and value of the sacred liturgy. There is a distinct Catholic culture that we must foster and defend for the salvation of the world depends upon it. Culture is *the common way of life* of a people (Christopher Dawson). Culture embraces nearly the totality of man's endeavours; and for the Catholic, this means that this human embrace also includes the Transcendent. In this supernatural vision, we can arrive at the full and proper understanding of our true nature as human beings, created and chosen by God to share in His life.

In the school of the sacred liturgy we are formed in goodness and grow in likeness to the God whom we adore; and this worship transforms our life. In the sacred liturgy is experienced the harmony of the human and the divine. The best of human artistry in all fields of human endeavour has always been offered to God in sacred worship. *The liturgy is at once the mirror of a culture and its culmination* (Jean Leclercq, O.S.B., *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, p. 308). In the liturgy, all our resources fully attain their potentiality; that is, they are or become what they are truly meant to be for they are restored to God in a homage which recognises that they come from Him. Thus at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, the doxology declares: *Through Him and with Him and in Him, O God, Almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is Yours, for ever and ever.* In the Eucharistic Prayer, the Church is always one with our Lord, Jesus Christ as His Atoning Sacrifice is re-presented and He becomes present of the altar and united to this self-giving, the Church and each one of us individually is united to this offering. This is true worship; sincere, reverent and devout. *Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*; this ancient adage of the Church expresses both the primacy of worship in our life and its purpose: *the norm of prayer is the norm of belief, is the norm of life* – a unity of worship and life that gives meaning and purpose to all that we do.

May our worship teach us *today* to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (*Mt. 6:33*). With love and fear, that is to say, profound reverence, let us do all that we can to adore the living God in Christ for *in Him...we have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of His glory* (*Eph. 1:11-12*).