

# ATTENDANCE AT MASS AND PARTICIPATION IN THE LITURGY

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The Church aims at leading all men to Christ, Who gives all honor and glory to God the Father in union with the Holy Ghost. This is, in fact, the reason for our existence: to glorify God, i.e., by recognizing His transcendence, His majesty, His power, His goodness and by singing His praises.

And no human being can do this except through Christ, with Him and in Him. This is likewise the first purpose of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

That is why everyone should go to Mass: not just because they must or to avoid committing a mortal sin, but in order to participate in the great liturgy of our Mother the Church, Who wants to gather Her children for this great “action” of Her Spouse. This “action” proclaims to God the Father that His children love Him as well as His beloved Son.

If we would better understand why there is a Church precept to go to Mass, let us recall to mind here the fourfold purpose of the sacrifice of the Cross, which is the same purpose as in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

The first is **adoration**: to acknowledge the greatness, majesty and power of God, and to humble oneself before Him.

The second is **thanksgiving**: to thank Him for the many gifts, both universal and personal, for many graces, for so much goodness and mercy towards us, poor sinners.

The third is **propitiation**: to make reparation and expiation for our faults, and to implore pardon of God for all sins, whether known or unknown, whether committed by ourselves or by others.

The fourth is **petition**: to expose to God all our needs and to pray to Him for those who need His graces.

No human being can afford to neglect the accomplishment of these four duties, if he wants to prove to God that he really loves Him and wants to receive all the graces necessary for his eternal salvation. However nobody except our Lord Jesus Christ can wholly fulfil these duties, Whose homage is pleasing and acceptable to God, because of the purity of His love and the offering of Himself. Our Lord Jesus Christ comes to us with the holy and pure gift of Himself, through the hands of the Church and her ministers. He invites us to present our gifts, miserable and imperfect though they be, to combine them with His own so that they may be acceptable to God the Father.

Thus, Sunday Mass summarizes all our prayers from the previous week, and all our efforts and meritorious acts, even those of the following week are contained in the holy oblation of our Lord in such a way that they are rendered pleasing and acceptable to His Father. Isn't this an outstanding proof of goodness and tenderness? Do we really need to be forced by the Church to go and have recourse to our Lord, to tell Him that we love Him, to unite ourselves to His sacrifice in order to receive His Divinity in return, and His soul, His Body, His Blood, His life given up for us, His patience and power, strength and goodness together with the immense blessing which the Father has reserved for his Son

and for all those who resemble Him?

## **Our Sunday Obligation**

Let us remark first of all that this precept is not restrictive. True, it is both allowed and even encouraged to spend an important part of Sunday in religious activities in order to better sanctify Sunday, e.g., to assist at a longer Mass rather than a short one, to attend Vespers or Compline; to spend more time with the family in relaxation, music, walks, games, prayers, good readings or visits to a shrine....

But the Church obliges, strictly speaking, only attendance at Mass. Moreover, this is an obligation for each and every Catholic aged seven and older, under pain of mortal sin, and there are certain conditions to be fulfilled which follow. We will not speak here about dress code, although this is likewise an important issue.

**1. The Mass must be whole and entire**, that is, one must be present from beginning to end, from the first sign of the cross until the Last Gospel inclusively, and all the ceremonies must be part of only one particular Mass; one may not go to the end of one Mass and then attend the beginning of the next (two halves of a Mass do not equal one complete Mass). It is a venial sin if one misses out on a non-essential part of the Mass, on purpose or by culpable negligence, for example, from the beginning until the beginning of the Offertory, or all that follows after Communion.

**2. It is a grave sin if one is voluntarily absent from a notable part**—quantitatively or qualitatively—of the Mass. One must be aware that, if the essence of the Sacrifice consists solely of the double consecration, its completion includes the priest's Communion, whereby the victim is consumed. To miss one part which belongs to the integrity of the sacrifice is a grave sin. Whoever arrives after the twofold consecration has definitively missed the Mass and must hope for another Mass at which to assist).

As for the quantity, or duration, it is again a grave sin to be absent for one third of the Mass, depending on how long the absence was and what part of the Mass was missed. For example, the time before the Gospel together with the time after Communion, half of the Canon, or from the beginning of the Mass until the Offertory inclusively. If one comes in just before the consecration, one should stay until the end of the Mass, but cannot receive Communion because of a grave sin just committed. If on that day there were a later Mass, he should go then, and would not be bound to stay at the first Mass.

**3) Physical and moral presence.** One must be able to follow what the celebrant does; one must at least be able to follow the movements of the crowd, but it would be best to be able to see and hear the priest himself. Even outside the church building one can still assist at Mass for as long as one stays united with the group of faithful inside. But one does not attend Mass and fulfil the Sunday obligation by following—without sufficient reason—the Mass on the radio, television, a loud speaker that is more than 30 feet away from the church, or with the help of binoculars.

**4) A religious, devout attendance.** One should first of all have the intention which is required by the Church, i.e., the intention to assist at Mass and to honor God by an act of religion. And one must have sufficient attention. A certain interior attention, or presence of mind, is required so that this is truly a human act, and not just a simple physical presence. Real exterior attention is also required, which consists in avoiding everything inconsistent with being at Mass: falling asleep, talking, reading profane literature, etc. It is licit to go to confession during Mass, because it does not interfere with this attention,

on condition that one does follow the Mass while standing in line.

Although the Church cannot exempt us from keeping Sundays holy, since this is a divine precept, She can dispense us from doing it by assisting at Mass, an ecclesiastical precept.

There are three causes which may exempt from the Sunday obligation:

1. **Necessity:** physical or moral impossibility such as sickness, convalescence, nervous problems because of the crowd, too far to drive, etc.
2. **Duties of state:** soldiers, doctors, nurses, firemen on duty, mothers with very young children, etc.
3. **Charity:** the needs of our neighbor, such as taking care of the sick, etc.

In all these cases it is not required to make up by attending Mass during the week, even though that would be laudable; but it is still necessary to sanctify Sunday in some other way as best one can. The best thing would be to spend as much time privately in prayer, as one would have otherwise spent at Mass on Sunday.

The above remarks apply only to Masses which are an obligation. There is no sin whatever in missing parts of a weekday Mass.

## **Participation in the Liturgy**

The Mass and the liturgy follow a rite which has been set by the Church and by Tradition, according to rules which are not arbitrary. The least movement in liturgy is charged with a meaning and sense. We will endeavor here to show how much more one may profit from the liturgy by a closer participation of all with the movements, postures, prayers or chant of our ceremonies. Dom Gueranger says:

Liturgy is tradition at its highest degree of power and solemnity,... the essence of Catholic liturgy is found in an alliance of poetry with the Faith.

If we would like drinking from the pure source of Tradition, if we would like to pray and believe as the Church does, then how agreeable it should be to us to adapt ourselves to all her gestures and rubrics, so that her faith and her all-powerful prayer can penetrate our souls.

Listen to what Dom Gueranger had to say a little over a century ago. He was neither a modernist nor a progressive!:

The prayer of the Church is the most pleasing to the ears and heart of God, and, besides, the most powerful. Blessed are those who pray with the Church.... Thus for more than a thousand years, we have seen that the Church, who would pray seven times a day in her temples and in the middle of the night, never prayed alone? The faithful kept her company and took delight in the manna which was hidden under the words and the mysteries of the divine liturgy....

The liturgy is not just prayer, but rather prayer made in a public manner. A private prayer, made in one's own name, is not liturgical.

Although the authority of Dom Gueranger in these matters is indisputable, note that he is not the only one of this opinion. Far from it.

## **Arguments from Authority and Tradition**

At a time of liturgical decadence, Pope Pius X sounded the alarm with his first *motu proprio*. He declared that the active participation in the most holy mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church is the first and indispensable source of the good Catholic, a bold statement were it not coming from the mouth of a pope. In an urge to restore all things in Christ and in the Church, Pius X wanted to give back to the faithful assembled for worship the *esprit de corps*, and sense of cult and hierarchy which had been lost. With this end in view he laid down that everyone should sing the answers at Solemn High Masses. His Holiness declared that this was just a beginning. The momentum once given should not be stopped. And it was only logical that, as active participation at sung Masses consists of chant, so active participation at Low Masses would be realized by reciting the liturgical texts (Dom Gaspar Lefebvre, *La vie spirituelle*, Dec., 1921).

This active participation, which all too often is a subject of dispute and meets with refusal because it is badly understood, is neither a modernist innovation, nor one of those misguided ideas of the Liturgical Movement of this century, but is one of the most traditional forms of liturgical prayer. It has unfortunately died out in the course of the past few centuries due to a diminishing faith and on account of the repeated onslaughts of the Revolution. Thanks to Dom Gueranger and to St. Pius X, devotion to the liturgy has been enkindled among the faithful, who had become isolated from the priest and the altar and concentrated too much on personal prayer, which had kept from them the wealth of graces which the Holy Ghost has stored in the age-old liturgical prayer of the Church. While it is undeniable that the modernists have made an horrible abuse of this return movement towards the liturgy by introducing a reform which has ended up in the post-conciliar revolution, this fact does not justify the refusal and rejection of everything. A more active participation in the liturgy does not necessarily lead to the *Novus Ordo Missae*. That is simplifying things too much; for, between these two realities there is a substantial difference.

We must clarify however, that the Church has never wanted to impose categorically that this active participation be accomplished exclusively by chant, responses and position....:

The temperaments, characters and leanings of men are so varied and different, that not all can be governed and led in the same way with prayers, canticles and common acts. Moreover, the needs of souls and their tastes are not the same everywhere and do not always remain the same in each and everyone (Pius XII).

Bishop (Antonio) de Castro Mayer reminds us in his pastoral Letter of 1953 about the problems of the modern-day apostolate, that:

[The encyclical] *Mediator Dei* insists upon union with the intentions of Christ our Lord and that of the celebrant, and leaves it entirely up to the faithful how to realize this end... All exclusivity in this matter is reproachable.

It remains nevertheless true that the way preferred by the Church, and which is of itself most apt to effect this union, is the active participation in liturgical ceremonies:

Those ways to participate at the Holy Sacrifice are praiseworthy and recommendable when they carefully obey the precepts of the Church and the rules of the sacred rites.

St. Pius X used to say:

It is not a matter of saying one's prayers at Mass, but of making the Mass one's prayer.

The Church has always invited her children to join in her prayers, in her chants and in her life. A few quotations will sufficiently illustrate this:

I have shed many tears at the sound of hymns and canticles, and the sweet voices of the Church aroused in me a lively emotion! The chants reached my ears, the truth descended into my heart, and while it was so good to listen to these, pious sentiments started to glow in me and the tears to flow (St. Augustine, *Confessions*, IX, 6).

History is a witness to the fact that a great number of pagans converted and became civilized due to the singing of liturgical chants in the old basilicas, where the bishop, the clergy and the faithful sang alternately the divine praises. In these churches, the opponents of the Catholic Faith learned to know what the dogma of the Communion of Saints meant. The Emperor Valens, for instance, was overcome and fainted at the sight of the majesty wherewith St. Basil celebrated the divine mysteries; the heretics of Milan blamed St. Ambrose that the crowds were fascinated by the liturgical chants, and the same chants moved Augustine to adhere to faith in Christ. Later on in the Middle Ages, almost the whole town would form an enormous singing choir at religious events. The craftsmen, architects, sculptors and even scholars at this period drew their knowledge of things theological from the liturgy, and up till today their inspiration is marked out in their monuments (Pius XI, *Divini Cultus*, Dec. 20, 1928).

Just how weak the faith has become may be seen from the fact that the faithful don't seem to have the need anymore to use chant as the most lofty form and expression of their prayer (Dom Gueranger).

It is our most ardent desire that a real Christian spirit flourish and be dominant among the faithful. In order to obtain this, the church where the faithful gather must be kept holy and dignified before anything else. They come to acquire this spirit right at its primordial and indispensable source: the active participation with the holy mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church (St. Pius X, Feast of St. Cecilia, Nov. 22, 1903).

The faithful should certainly not attend church prayers like strangers or deaf mute onlookers; they ought to join in with the sacred ceremonies and, filled with the beauty of the liturgy, they ought to blend their voices alternately with the voice of the priests and of the schola, according to the prescribed rules. Thus it will come to an end that the people hardly respond at all or respond only with some faint murmur to the common prayers which are recited in the liturgical language (Pius XI on Dec. 20, 1928).

In the absence of a formal obligation, it is clearly fitting that, throughout the Mass, the faithful conform their posture to that of those in the sanctuary (*L'Ami du clergé*, 1925).

It would be a great improvement if the faithful at our churches and chapels, no matter who they are, would stop attending the public ceremonies of the Catholic worship like passive, deaf onlookers, but that they more and more take on an active part in the worship. According to the wish of the Sovereign Pontiff they would do best by first of all tuning in on the regular sacred chants which are meant to be sung by all. Bishop Laliou says there is nothing that sounds better than this harmonious fusion of the hearts and voices singing together Gregorian melodies. Yet this is not enough. Because the feelings of the soul are not only expressed by spoken and sung words, but at the same time and almost necessarily also by the exterior posture of the body. Hence the Church has prescribed a detailed and uniform ceremonial for the clergy in their attendance at choral and liturgical functions. As for the faithful themselves, to say the least it would be very fitting that they do not stay aloof from what the clergy does, but on the contrary that they imitate their reverence and ritual and thus show their close union with them with faith and devotion (*L'Ami du clergé*, 1935).

## **Theological Arguments**

Although St. Thomas Aquinas does not treat this question specifically, nevertheless, we can find all the necessary answers and ultimate reasons for active participation in the prayers of the Church in his treatise on the virtue of religion (*Summa Theologica*, IIa IIae, QQ. 80-100). There are five main arguments:

**1) To stir up greater interior devotion and thus render to God a most perfect homage.** The virtue of religion moves us to render to God the homage which is due to Him. This homage consists essentially in a spiritual act, by which we as creatures express our loving reverence to God. We need to use our senses in order to encourage these beautiful spiritual acts in our souls, by which God is glorified. This is necessarily so due to our very nature. For although it is true that to give glory to God one must become spiritually united to Him, it is likewise certain that we cannot foster this spiritual life unless we rely on tangible rites.

**2) To render to God all that is due to Him,** and to express in a sensible way that God has a sovereign power both over our bodies and souls. For if we want to give perfect homage to God, we must practice the virtue of religion with our whole human nature, so that even our bodies serve the purpose of giving glory to God by an expression of total dependence upon Him.

**3) To make amends for our sins;** to curb our inordinate inclinations and thus re-establish order within the sinner himself. Certain bodily gestures are incorporated in the liturgy precisely because they require making an effort and because they humble us before God.

**4) To manifest our interior devotion by an exterior expression.** St. Thomas says this is like a spontaneous overflow of the interior devotion. The one who prays ardently finds that his ardor affects the sensitive faculties as well.

**5) To unite our prayers with those of our neighbors** and to encourage one another to devotion, by means of public worship that is social, shared, unanimous and thus ordered. A few quotes will better illustrate these arguments:

Now the human mind, in order to be united to God, needs to be guided by the sensible world...Wherefore in the Divine worship it is necessary to make use of corporeal things, that man's mind may be aroused thereby, as by signs, to the spiritual acts by means of which he is united to God. (*ST*, IIa IIae, Q.81, A.7.).

The voice is employed in individual prayers for three reasons: in order to excite interior devotion—to pay a debt to God, with body and mind—and through a certain overflow from the soul into the body....(*ST*, IIa IIae, Q.83, A.12.)

St. Thomas has a reply to the objection that “*words prevent man from ascending to God by contemplation,*” by stating that:

Words about other matters distract the mind and hinder the devotion of those who pray: but words signifying some object of devotion lift up the mind, especially one that is less devout.

We exhibit signs of humility in our bodies in order to incite our affections to submit to God...thus when we genuflect we signify our weakness in comparison with God, and when we prostrate ourselves we profess that we are naught of ourselves (*ST, IIa IIae, Q.84, A.2.*).

We employ words, in speaking to God, not indeed to make known our thoughts to Him Who is the searcher of hearts, but that we may bring ourselves and our hearers to reverence Him. Consequently, we need to praise God with our lips for our own sake, since by praising Him our devotion is aroused towards Him. The praise of God is also profitable to others by inciting their affections towards God....It profits one nothing to praise with the lips if one praise not with the heart. Yet the outward praise of the lips avails to arouse the inward fervor of those who praise, and to incite others to praise God. (*ST, IIa IIae, Q.91, A.1.*)

The soul is distracted from that which is sung by a chant that is employed for the purpose of giving pleasure. But if the singer chant for the sake of devotion, he pays more attention to what he says, both because he lingers more thereon, and because, as St. Augustine remarks: "Each affection of our spirit, according to its variety, has its own appropriate measure in the voice and singing, by some hidden correspondence wherewith it is stirred." The same applies to the hearers, for even if some of them understand not what is sung, namely, for God's glory: and this is enough to arouse their devotion. (*ST, IIa IIae, Q.91, A.2.*)

## **The Meaning of Different Postures and Movements**

**1) Standing:** This is the liturgical posture *par excellence*. The first Christians used to pray standing. The priest remains faithful to this attitude throughout his liturgical functions, and except for some rare instances he is always standing. St. John Chrysostom remarked already in the 4th century that:

The priest does not sit down, but remains standing; to be standing signifies that he is engaged in a liturgical action.

This position evokes joyfulness. For this reason one does not kneel down after the first Vespers of Sunday, and it is still the custom to stand during the recitation or chant of the antiphon to our Lady at Paschal Time (*Regina Coeli*), likewise during the *Angelus* on Saturday evening and on Sundays. The hymns of the Divine Office are always recited or sung standing, because they are in praise of God's glory or of His saints.

This position is also an expression of **commitment and faith**. When a man wants to make an important statement with firmness and solemnity, he does so standing up spontaneously, for instance someone who swears an oath or who "takes a stand" on his honor.

It is moreover an expression of **respect and deference**. People rise when somebody important comes in or takes his leave; similarly, one gets up to answer or speak to a superior. We stand to honor a cause, a symbol, or to celebrate the memory of an



illustrious man or woman, or during the moments of silence at certain gatherings. One gives a standing ovation to hail a hero or to applaud a noble deed.

**2) Kneeling:** There are three forms: genuflection, kneeling, and prostration.

- **Genuflection** is a form of homage paid to God's majesty. It is reserved for God, and for Christ either on the cross or in the Eucharist, and at certain passages which refer to Christ (*Et homo factus est, Et Verbum caro factum est...*). One makes a genuflection towards a bishop at certain ceremonies, or to kiss his ring. Only before the Blessed Sacrament in exposition does one make a genuflection on two knees.

Let us note here that nothing is more ungraceful and more useless than to make a sign of the cross while genuflecting. For each gesture has its own meaning, and should be done separately.

- **Kneeling** implies adoration, humility and supplication all at once. This posture is personal rather than collective. This is fitting for the purpose of accusing oneself (*Confiteor*), of imploring (*Judica me, Veni Creator, Veni Sancte Spiritus, Adjuva nos*) and for adoration (at the consecration, communion, thanksgiving).
- **Prostrations** are occasionally done only by the celebrant and his ministers, and by persons who are going to be consecrated to God (priestly ordinands, catechumens, virgins...).

**3) Sitting:** This is a position for meditation and listening, and is fitting at the Epistle, the readings, the longer chants, the sermon....

Whenever the celebrant is seated, it is allowed for others to sit also; but then everyone should be seated so as to keep order among the crowd.

**4) Other Movements:**

- **The Sign of the Cross.** This is the seal which marks the Catholic and which should be the hallmark of his every action. It is used at the onset of every liturgical action, together with a formula which shows its meaning, e.g., *In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti; Deus in adiutorium meum intende....* We use it when we receive a blessing, which is always conferred in the name of redemption through the cross.... Furthermore, at the most solemn moments of the liturgy, namely, the Gospel, and the hymns of the New Testament. (Sometimes it has a slightly different form: three signs of the cross, made on the forehead, the lips and the heart.)

The sign of the cross, being a sacramental of the Church, is instrumental for actual graces and should be made with faith and attention. If we do it well, i.e., slowly and carefully, with composure, and moving the hand from forehead to chest and from shoulder to shoulder, then we are blessed with a holy and sacred blessing from the Cross that brings salvation.

- **Inclinations.** These are used to make special reverences and supplications to God. They range from simple nods of the head only, to inclinations with both head and shoulders or both head, shoulders and chest, and their purpose is to give extra meaning to the words they accompany. Thus, the celebrant makes a

profound inclination to better express his contrition or supplication at the *Confiteor, Munda cor, Te igitur, Supplices, etc....* An inclination with the head only is made by all when the celebrant invites to a prayer (*Oremus*), at the *Gloria Patri*, at the names of Jesus, Mary, and the saint of the day. These movements express an invitation or are a manifestation of the “inclination” of the heart, according to the meaning of the words they accompany. The faithful should get used to making these signs of reverence.

- **Striking one’s breast.** This gesture was used by the Jews, signified grief, mourning or sorrow, and the Church still keeps it to express contrition and to ask pardon of God. Logically one should strike the breast only at the words which refer to ourselves as sinners (*mea culpa, miserere nobis, dona nobis pacem, Domine non sum dignus...*) and not, for example, at the *Agnus Dei* of a Requiem Mass, where it says *dona eis requiem* instead of *miserere nobis*.

For the rest, the liturgy does not require striking the breast at the *Agnus Dei* which occurs at the end of litanies, but does prescribe it for the *Litany of the Saints* at the words “*Peccatores, te rogamus, audi nos.*” Finally, it is not necessary to strike one’s breast with loud and violent banging, or to make a dramatic performance of it with grand and wide gestures. Just a discreet, silent strike will do plenty to intimate one’s contrition before God.

## Answers to a Few Questions

**Question: I understand your explanations and I would like to follow your suggestions so as to pray more in the way in which the Church prays. But should we always actively participate with these responses, gestures and postures, at High Masses, Low Masses and even private Masses? For example should I observe the same rules when I am all alone at a private Mass early in the morning, or with only a handful of faithful at a Low Mass?**

**Answer:** First of all we should recall that none of these rules is obligatory. It is merely the wish of the Church that the faithful participate actively at Mass, but she does not want to force anything. The best answer we can give you would be by giving you an extract of the general rubrics for Mass taken from the Roman Missal:

No. 269: The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass which is celebrated in accordance with canons and rubrics, is an act of public worship offered to God in the name of Christ and the Church. The name “private Mass” should therefore be avoided.

No. 271: There are two sorts of Masses, namely, the *missa in cantu*, and Low Mass.

It is a Mass *in cantu* when the celebrant sings all the parts to be sung in accordance with the rubrics; otherwise it is a Low Mass. Moreover, the Mass *in cantu*, when celebrated with the assistance of deacon and subdeacon, is called a Solemn Mass; if it is celebrated without these

sacred ministers, it is simply called a High Mass [*missa cantata*].

Finally a Solemn Mass with a bishop for celebrant or someone who has the faculty to take his place, and which is celebrated with the solemnities described in the liturgical books for this purpose, is called a Pontifical Mass.

No. 272: Those who come to Mass are naturally required to assist in a suitable manner. The various ways in which the faithful may actively participate at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass must be regulated to avoid abuse, and to attain to the principal purpose of this participation, which is a greater solemnity in the worship of God and the edification of the faithful.

**Question: You tell us to change position and to respond, but quite often we can find seminarians, priests and even the Rector of the seminary at Mass who are present at Mass without budging, entirely engrossed in their prayer books?...**

**Answer:** Evidently, these rules apply only to those who are really attending Mass and who have come to receive Holy Communion. But if it is your second Mass that you attend out of devotion, or if you happen to be in the chapel to say some prayers while a Mass was going on and you merely intended to unite your prayers (e.g., meditation, divine office, rosary) interiorly to those being said at the altar, you are not held to the same rules. And these are no doubt the cases you were referring to. Our priests and seminarians like to pray, recite their breviary and pray their rosaries during Mass, even though they have said or attended Mass already or are going to do so. In this case no active participation is needed, but a bare minimum respect is still required, such as that they should not be seated during the Gospel or during the consecration and distribution of Communion.

## **The Ultimate and Last Objection**

**Question: This is all fine theory coming from Ecône, Switzerland, but these things were never practiced in the parish where I came from, when we had “Fr. So-’n-So” for Pastor, and he was a very saintly man!**

**Answer:** Who is from Ecône?—Not anyone I’ve quoted here. St. Augustine? St. Thomas Aquinas? Dom Gueranger? St. Pius X? Pius XII? Dom Gaspar Lefebvre? All Ecône does is keep the holy traditions of the saints, the doctors of the Church and the popes, this in keeping also with the wishes of her venerable founder.

Nobody would dare to question the virtues of your saintly pastor. But the saints and popes to whom we referred certainly have more authority than your pastor ....Enters Vatican Council II, with total destruction for the result! How many pastors would ever have read *Mediator Dei* of Pope Pius XII (Nov. 20, 1947)? Might it be plausible that if Pius XII had been better listened to and obeyed, the liturgy in the ‘50’s and ‘60’s would have been improved and would have been less subject to the criticism which led to its

destruction?

## Conclusion

Taken as a whole, the liturgy is the collection of symbols, chants and acts by means of which the Church expresses and manifests its religion towards God. The liturgy is not, therefore, just prayer, but rather prayer elevated to the public domain. Private prayer, made in the name of a single person, is not liturgy.

As the Church is a society, not of spirits, but of men, creatures composed of souls and bodies, who communicate all truth by means of images and signs, so in the Church, this heavenly assembly of profession, prayer and praise, spoken in a sacred language, modulated on a supernatural rhythm, is also produced by means of external signs, rites and ceremonies which constitute the body of the liturgy (Dom Gueranger).

To be united to the liturgy of the Church, to the soul of the Church praying, our personal prayer does not suffice. We must accede by means of the body of the liturgy, unite our bodies to her body, in order to unite our soul to her soul.

Undoubtedly, part of the faithful are incapable of attaining this union, for want of adequate formation or preparation, by ignorance, by weakness, or fragility. And that is why the Church never wishes to force anyone to join in this kind of participation, but her desire is clear: *Let all of those who are able to do so join themselves to her prayer by an active participation in the liturgy.*

The objection is classic and is repeated unceasingly: How can these words, these chants, these changes of position, favor the silent recollection of prayer? St. Thomas has already responded to the objection, and one could wonder why it should be considered a distraction from prayer to sing the praises of God, or to manifest outwardly one's devotion? If singing the praises of God is not praying and praising God, then it would be necessary to raze the liturgy.

The liturgy is the *public* worship of the Church. Now, the Church praying is the priest at the altar with all the ministers and all the faithful. Thus, the liturgy is not the sum of the *personal* prayers of the faithful while on the altar the Sacred Mysteries unfold. Rather, it is the one, unanimous, common prayer of the whole Church, united to allow Christ to hear the unique voice of his Spouse, and to unite ourselves to the voice of Christ who intercedes with the Father for her. It is the "one heart and one soul" of the Apostles realized in public prayer.

This in no way suppresses the "silent recollection of prayer." It is a quality of private prayer, but also of liturgical prayer, during the times when the priest himself prays silently. To unite oneself to the chant of the Church, to respond to the chant or to the words of the priest, to manifest one's attention and union by words and deeds, or to unite oneself to the silence of the priest are so many ways of praying, and all are liturgical. But to knowingly and willingly disdain to respond to the priest and unite oneself to the common prayers, positions, and chant, etc., is to shut oneself up in a personal religion (akin to a Protestant mentality) that is no longer "liturgy."