

Do *This* In Memory of Me

Perhaps no other teaching regarding the Sacred Liturgy is more misunderstood than the desire of the Church that the participation of the laity be conscious, full and active. The teaching is not misunderstood because the plain meaning of the words are not clear, quite the contrary, the difficulty emerges when certain modern liturgists drop the word *conscious* and simply say *full and active*. Full and active participation is generally leveraged in such a way as to lend the impression that to participate in the Mass one must always be busy. This is not the case and it fails to truly embody the mind of the Church in this particular matter.

When the Church teaches that the faithful are to participate in the Mass in a manner that is conscious, active and full, she immediately adds, *namely in body and in mind (GIRM no.18)*. From this clarification the intention of the Church is made perfectly clear, the gestures of the body follow upon what the mind is pondering or dwelling on. For example, after pausing to call to mind personal sin, the *Confiteor* is recited, and as a sign of contrition the faithful strike their breast at the word *through my fault*. Also, after chanting the *Holy, holy, holy* the faithful immediately take to their knees in a posture of adoration anticipating the Presence of Jesus Christ Who is about to appear on the Altar under the appearance of Bread and Wine. In both of these cases it is easy to see that a bodily movement or posture expresses a mystery that the mind is presently contemplating and flows from it.

In chapter one of the *Instruction*, the Church begins with the affirmation that the Mass is *the action of Christ and of the people of God (the Church) (GIRM no.16)*. Clearly the Mass is first of all the action of Christ since it is He who instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice, and then commanded us to do It in His memory. But it is also an action of the Church, united as a body to its Head, hierarchically arranged, and not just an action of the Church but *the center of the whole Christian life* down to the last and the least individual (*GIRM no.16*). Given the command of Christ, and that the *whole Christian life* is to be found in the celebration of the Mass, it is no wonder that the Church regards the participation of the lay faithful as something required by the very nature of the Mass itself as well as the *right and duty* of all of the baptized (*GIRM no.18*).

Considering all that has been said thus far we can begin to realize how grave and disruptive to the Christian life liturgical abuses truly are. A liturgical abuse is any occasion, no matter how small, in which someone, usually a bishop or priest, deliberately changes, alters, removes or makes substitutions to the text, gestures, postures, ritual and instructions that govern the celebration of the Mass. Because the faithful have a *right* to participate in the Mass in which is found *the whole of Christian life*, and therefore their life, bishops and priests are instructed in no uncertain terms that they *are not permitted, on (their) own initiative, to add, to remove, or to change anything in the celebration of the Mass (GIRM no.24)*.

So far conscious participation has been touched upon with regards to the body, but what of the voice, the use of the tongue? In numbers 34 through 37 of the *Instruction*, the Church outlines in a kind of hierarchy those parts of the Mass during which the lay faithful ought to speak or even sing. This section of the *Instruction* embodies the principles of the so-called *Dialogue Mass* that was a part of the reform of the Sacred Liturgy leading up to the Second Vatican Council. It is in the dialogue of the Mass, between the priest and the people, that the communitarian nature of the Mass is made manifest and is to be considered of *great significance (GIRM no.34)*.

By way of bullet points the following are those parts of the Mass that ought to be spoken or sung by the lay faithful:

- Responses to the priest's greetings, *the Lord be with you*, and the *Amen* after the prayers.
- The Penitential Act, the Creed, the Prayers of the Faithful and the Lord's Prayer.
- The Gloria, the Responsorial Psalm, the Alleluia before the Gospel, the Holy, holy, holy, the Memorial Acclamation and the chant *after* Communion (not to be confused with the Communion Antiphon).
- Entrance Antiphon, Offertory Antiphon, the Lamb of God and the Communion Antiphon.

By way of clarification the arrangement of the order of the responses made by the lay faithful has to do with the difficulty in reciting or singing some of these parts. It ought to be kept in mind that the Church's preferred liturgical language is Latin, and the Church is presuming that all of the parts listed above are being done in Latin, and for that reason the laity are invited to participate according to their ability, beginning with the easiest and graduating towards that which is most difficult. The more difficult parts of the Mass are usually taken up by a choir.

When we consider what the Church means by conscious, active and full participation it becomes clear that this principle is built upon the same principles that govern the interior life of prayer. Vocal prayer is wonderful, and we must all know our basic prayers, but superior to vocal prayers are the meditations made by the mind. Think of the classic hymn *Now Thank We All Our God*. In this hymn we sing that our gratitude is offered with *hearts and hands and voices*, the logical flow that the Church desires for the lay faithful as they participate in the Mass. Our worship begins in the mind, brings us to our knees in adoration and loosens our tongue in praise of the God who made us and redeemed us.

Before closing, it would be remiss if silence was not touched upon and its importance with respect to the participation of the people in the celebration of the Mass (*GIRM no.45*). Because of a misunderstanding that equates participation with being busy, silence has largely been sidelined and has given way to a noisier Mass during which someone is always having to sing or say something. Not only does this misunderstanding regarding participation lead to a distortion of the understanding of the Mass as something that ought to be entertaining, but the lack of silence and other occasions that would allow the lay faithful to recollect themselves, can make the Sacred Liturgy fatiguing to the spirit and not something that refreshes and strengthens it.

In close it would be sufficient to say that the whole structure of the Mass, its parts, as well as the participation of the lay faithful, ought to be so ordered as to be conducive to the recollection of the minds of the people, so that their prayer, praise and adoration may truly flow from a mind raised above the cares of this world into the realm of things divine, and excite the heart to gratitude and love.