

# It Is the Call of God That Matters

An Interview by Christophe Geffroy, published in the July-August 2020 n° 327 of *La Nef*.

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**Father Andrzej Komorowski, originally from Poland, was elected in July 2018 as superior general of the Fraternity Sacerdotale Saint-Pierre (FSSP). He speaks to us here of his Fraternity and of his future.**

**La Nef – You are Polish, a country where the traditionalist movement has not developed as much as in France or the United States: how did you come to know and be attracted to the Fraternité Saint-Pierre?**

**Abbot Andrzej Komorowski** – My very first contact with the Traditional Mass was in 1996. I was then a student in Poznan and some of my friends attended the Traditional Mass. A little out of curiosity I went there for the first time, then I began to attend regularly, to serve Mass and to take an interest in the question of liturgical reform and the traditionalist movement. It was then through a Polish deacon from the seminary in Wigratzbad that I got to know the Society of Saint Peter.

**What is the liturgical situation in Poland? And what is the position of the Polish bishops with regard to the FSSP and the extraordinary form of the Roman rite?**

The situation has changed a lot since the *Motu proprio Summorum Pontificum* of 2007. Previously, there were a few places where the traditional mass was celebrated, not always regularly. Today we have about 45 places where Mass is celebrated every Sunday. We have 41 dioceses in Poland, so on average there is a little more than one traditional Mass per diocese. It's a huge step forward, but there are still many devotees who do not have the opportunity to attend. I would say that the Polish bishops are rather indifferent to this question because they do not give the liturgy a central place. Above all, they see that the number of Catholics attached to this Mass is very low compared to that of the faithful practicing in the ordinary form. In Poland there are a lot of priests and a lot of masses, but the quality of the celebrations is not "extraordinary"!

**Are you, like your compatriots, a great admirer of the holy Pope John Paul II? What do you think is his most essential contribution?**

First of all, I must say that my compatriots are attached to the person of John Paul II rather outwardly. There are many squares, streets or schools that bear his name, but his thought is not really known. We are proud of him, but unfortunately it does not go much further, even in the life of the Church. However, I think he inspired many priestly vocations. After the fall of communism, he reminded us that we must remain faithful to all aspects of our Catholic faith in individual and social life. Finally, I believe that his defense of Christian morality, especially concerning respect for life and the sanctity of marriage, is the most important.

**You were elected Superior General of the FSSP almost two years ago: what is your assessment of these two years of experience at the head?**

These first two years were an opportunity for me to get to know our apostolates and our confreres better. With over 300 priests around the world, there are some I had never met personally. And the superior is above all at the service of his colleagues. Our community is growing and we must be grateful to Providence. But more members and more apostolates also mean more difficult and delicate situations. The last three months marked by Covid-19 have also placed us in unprecedented situations. We were, like many diocesan priests, faced with a difficult choice: not to abandon the sheep and to obey the orders of authority. We do not know what the future will bring us, but I believe that if we are faithful to our vocation and to our Constitutions, we will be able to manage all kinds of crises.

**How would you characterize the FSSP, its uniqueness? In other words, what are the main motivations that drive a young person today to knock on your door rather than elsewhere?**

As our Constitutions say, “the Sacrifice of the Mass is at the heart of the spirituality and the apostolate of the Fraternity”. Thus, we seek the sanctification of priests, by conforming their whole life to the mystery celebrated at the altar, the redemptive sacrifice, and by living together, which makes it possible to strive for the perfection of charity. We are supported by three pillars: faithful observance of Latin liturgical and spiritual traditions, a healthy Thomist formation, and fidelity to the successor of Peter and to the Magisterium of the Church. We do not welcome vocations of a typical profile; but it is certain that fervent families, scouting, Catholic schools, are the breeding ground for many of these vocations. Converts are also turning to our Fraternity. For example, one of the formative priests of Saint Peter’s seminary was baptized as an adult while pursuing a doctorate in philosophy at the Sorbonne: the discovery of Saint Thomas Aquinas led him to Christ.

**What is the current situation of the FSSP, especially in France, are you developing as you wish or are you still encountering obstacles?**

The progression is constant and regular in the world: this summer, we will have the joy of counting fourteen new priests and, at the start of the school year, we will open several apostolates. This progression can also be seen in France, where requests are even greater than the capacities of the FSSP. The Motu Proprio of 2007 was decisive: the demands of the faithful have not stopped growing since then. Certainly, the non-celebration by our priests of the ordinary form could be considered as an obstacle to our development. There are indeed fewer and fewer priests in the dioceses and some bishops regret that we do not celebrate according to the missal of Paul VI. But we are convinced of the missionary dimension of the traditional liturgy, which is not reserved for those who already know it but can attract the most distant souls to Jesus Christ. If we were to celebrate the ordinary form to “reach more people” that would imply, in a nutshell, that we recognize that the extraordinary form is not suitable for today’s evangelism and should remain reserved for “initiates”. It is true that this is often a point of misunderstanding. Nevertheless, in France, some forty bishops have entrusted us with a mission in their diocese.

It is also a French bishop, Mgr. Renauld de Dinechin, who will ordain at the end of this month of June in his cathedral of Laon, three new priests for the Fraternity.

**You say that the refusal of concelebration can be an obstacle to your development: how would concelebrating with the Ordinary call into question the fact that the Church recognizes the legitimacy of your attachment to the extraordinary form?**

This question of concelebration arises differently in different countries. In France this has taken on a very great importance, to the point of eclipsing the other signs of communion, foremost among which is Eucharistic communion itself. It is true that the priests of the FSSP do not concelebrate because they have chosen the extraordinary form. Having a character of its own, recognized by the Church, whose heart is the faithful observance of Latin liturgical traditions, is a talent to be cultivated, a condition of fruitfulness, and not any hindrance. Our foundation, with the characteristics that are ours, was approved by the Holy See in 1988. We are faithful to our founding acts. Concelebration, moreover, is not obligatory according to the Code of Canon Law, as we were reminded a few years ago by the Ecclesia Dei Commission. It cannot be a condition for a mission in a diocese. Moreover, I observe that we are not lacking in apostolates, on the contrary! Finally, our choice is certainly due to an attachment to this liturgical form but also recalls the insufficiencies of the ordinary form. This is the reason why, since we don't have to, we don't wish to celebrate or concelebrate it.

**Today in France, a large part of vocations escapes the traditional diocesan circuits to go to new or traditional communities: how do you explain this phenomenon, is it not a danger for dioceses lacking in vocations?**

Perhaps this question should above all be the subject of reflection in the dioceses ... What is certain is that vocations do not follow "circuits", and seminars are not "channels". What is first in a vocation is the call of God.

What matters is to go where God actually calls. Because just as each soul is unique, vocations are not interchangeable. They should be welcomed as a gift from God. I will cite a historical example showing that we must not fall into a false dialectic: far from harming the dioceses, the development of societies of apostolic life after the Council of Trent (Oratorians, Lazarists, Eudists, Sulpicians ...) has greatly helped to the revitalization of the diocesan clergy. Seminaries of traditional communities, among other characteristics, offer Thomist training in philosophy as well as theology; St. Thomas Aquinas has been designated by the Church as the Common Doctor whose very sure teaching must be followed in seminaries. The vitality of the seminaries of the traditional communities is due in large part to this fidelity to Thomism. Here we bear witness to a wealth that can benefit the whole Church. Once again, I am convinced that the extraordinary form is missionary by nature: by the richness of its symbolism, the density of its prayers, its sense of the sacred and its very marked theocentrism. Just as it attracts many young Catholics, so it attracts young vocations thirsty for the absolute.

**The priests of the traditional communities serve places of worship that can be qualified as "privileged", because of the number of priests per faithful from which they benefit and also because these practitioners are very motivated: this operation in relatively closed silos (your priests only serve these chapels) is it not dangerous and how do you therefore participate in the evangelization that our world so badly needs?**

Allow me to answer you by using this expression of Benedict XVI: we will not make the desert bloom again without "spiritual oases" where souls can come to drink and recharge their batteries. Our places of worship are not Indian reservations: they are outposts in a de-Christianized world for spiritual recapture.

They offer, thanks be to God, spiritual means for holiness, an essential condition for a new evangelization. Let's face it, our chapels are privileged by the number of priests available, that is a fact. For the rest, I would temper your words: there is certainly in our churches, as in any parish, a nucleus of fervent and "militant" faithful, but there are also more and more "starters" or converts who have been able to be touched by the transcendence of the traditional Mass, by the personality of the priest who addressed them, or even by this or that member of the community. On the other hand, wearing the cassock promotes a habitual apostolate in the world, from the slightest exit in the street!

This allows our priests to stay in touch with the population, to know their outlook on the Church and the priesthood and thus to exercise an apostolate with people far from God or from the Church. Thus, the priests of the FSSP remain in touch with reality. This is the simplest and most natural evangelism!

Finally, as proof that we do not only serve the interests of a few privileged faithful, allow me to mention the recent approach of the Fraternity, in connection with other friendly traditional communities, with the Council of State which made possible the reopening of all the churches in France: this clearly shows that we are seeking the common good of the whole Church.

**A final word: what is for you the priority for the Church today?**

Refocus everything on Christ. It seems to me that, in recent years, the Church has become for many more and more like an NGO: it is more often a question of saving the planet or finding solutions to social and economic problems, than of the salvation brought by the Son of God. God became man to bring us life, life in abundance. If man is to regain true balance in the world, he must turn to the Lord and above all obey the laws established by the Creator.