

Cardinal Arinze's Address to FDLC

Highlights of the Liturgical Renewal

by **Francis Cardinal Arinze**

The keynote address at the national convention of the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions (FDLC) was given October 8 by the prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments, **Cardinal Francis Arinze**.

The convention was held at the Omni San Antonio Hotel, October 7-11, 2003. Cardinal Arinze's address, "Some Highlights of the Liturgical Renewal Initiated by *Sacrosanctum Concilium*", observed the FDLC's convention theme, the fortieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, released December 4, 1963.

On October 11, Cardinal Arinze spoke at the cathedral in Chicago about the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), and the following day he was the principal celebrant and homilist at a Mass at St. John Cantius parish, also in Chicago. The Mass was celebrated in Latin (*missa normative*, or "*Novus Ordo*") with chant and a Schubert setting of the Ordinary of the Mass.

The complete text of Cardinal Arinze's FDLC address appears here with his permission.

Editor

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1. Forty Years of Grace through the Liturgy

The celebration of the mysteries of our redemption, especially of the paschal mystery of the suffering, death and resurrection of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the Sacred Liturgy, is central in and to the life of the Church. Participation in liturgical celebrations is seen by the Second Vatican Council as "the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* [SC] 14).

It was, therefore, very fitting that the first of the sixteen documents to be issued by the Second Vatican Council was on the Sacred Liturgy. As *Sacrosanctum Concilium* was promulgated on December 4, 1963, "the first fruit of the Council" (John Paul II: *Vicesimus Quintus Annus* [VQA] 1) was offered to the entire Church.

Through the rich doctrine and wise directives offered by this Constitution, the road to liturgical renewal was marked out for the Church "in accordance with the conciliar principles of fidelity to tradition and openness to legitimate development" (*VQA* 4; cf also *SC* 23).

The crucial role of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* becomes clearer when we consider that a very close and organic bond does exist between sound liturgical renewal and the renewal of the whole life of the Church. After all, "the Liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all her power flows" (*SC* 10). "The Church not only acts but also expresses herself in the Liturgy and draws from the Liturgy the strength for her life" (John Paul II: *Dominicae Cenaes* [*DC*] 13). In particular, "the Church draws her life from the Eucharist" (John Paul II: *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* [*EE*], no. 1), "the fount and apex of the whole Christian life" (*Lumen Gentium* [*LG*] 11).

It is, therefore, right and proper that we take occasion of the fortieth anniversary celebration of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* to look back, to reflect, to look forward and to ask ourselves a few questions. I am very grateful to the Liturgical Committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and to the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions for your inviting me to this convention and asking me to share some reflections with you on *Sacrosanctum Concilium* yesterday, today and tomorrow. Let us begin by recounting some of the positive results realized by the Church since *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Then we shall dwell on the challenges posed by each of those results, namely: Bible and Liturgy, Translation, Adaptation and Inculturation, Active Participation, Roles for the Lay Faithful, Revitalization of Church life through the Liturgy, and Looking towards the Future.

2. Positive Results Since *Sacrosanctum Concilium*

In the liturgical life of the Church, some very good developments have taken place since *Sacrosanctum Concilium* was promulgated. Let us begin by listing some of them. In this way we thank God who guides His Church all through the ages. We also express gratitude to all those who have had a hand in this liturgical promotion, from those who worked on the liturgical texts, to the bishops, priests and members of liturgical committees or commissions like yourselves.

Pope John Paul II, in his Apostolic Letter, *Vicesimus Quintus Annus*, of December 4, 1988, in commemoration of twenty-five years of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, lists five of these positive results (cf 12). The first is the place given to the Bible in the Liturgy. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* insisted that the table of God's Word is to be made more abundantly available to the people of God in the Liturgy. If we reflect back to the past forty years, we see how the renewed liturgical rites have been made much richer with biblical texts. In the Mass, the lectionary is so arranged as to cover most of the Bible in a three-year Sunday reading and a two-year weekday lessons program. The responsorial psalms help to elucidate the readings. The sacramental rites and the celebrations of the sacramentals are suitably fitted with rich biblical texts. So is the Liturgy of the Hours. In this way not only are the faithful exposed, as it were, to a greater part of Holy Scripture

so as to become more familiar with it, but each community has the opportunity, in the specific setting of the liturgical celebration, to enter ever more deeply at all the levels of the human person into the great mystery of God's transforming love which the Scripture proclaims. In country after country, immense effort is undertaken to provide the Christian people with translations of the Bible.

A second happy development is the sustained effort to translate the various liturgical texts into the current language of the people and also to face the challenges of adapting liturgical celebration to the culture of each people.

A third reason for gratitude is "the increased participation of the faithful by prayer and song, gesture and silence, in the Eucharist and the other sacraments" (*VQA* 12). One has only to compare the way an average parish community takes part at Sunday Mass today to the way it did fifty years ago.

We are also encouraged because of "the ministries exercised by lay people and the responsibilities that they have assumed in virtue of the common priesthood into which they have been initiated through Baptism and Confirmation" (*VQA* 12). Very many happy developments have really taken place on this point.

Lastly, and as a summary of the above four areas, we must thank God "for the radiant vitality of so many Christian communities, a vitality drawn from the wellspring of the Liturgy" (*VQA* 12).

Each of these five positive results offers us reasons for joy and encouragement. But each also assigns us a task, poses us a challenge and enjoins on us to see that the developments remain truly positive, according to the desire and directives of the Council, and of the Pope and the Bishops who guide us today and tomorrow in the Church that Christ founded. How this applies to each of these five developments will be the focus for the rest of this paper.

3. Bible and Liturgy

"Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ", Saint Jerome tells us (Commentary on Isaiah, Prologue -- PL 24, 17). Ignorance of the Bible is a great handicap to an understanding of the Liturgy and the hoped-for fruit in participation in its celebration. A great part of the Liturgy is based on Holy Scripture, not only in the readings but also in the inspiration of the prayers, in the symbols and in the images dear to the public worship of the Church. Without a biblical understanding of exodus, covenant, chosen people, Isaac, paschal lamb, Passover, manna and promised land, how can the Liturgy be understood? The Psalms, in particular, are an indispensable source of liturgical language, signs and prayers.

"The Church is nourished on the Word of God as written down in the books of the Old and New Testaments. When the Church proclaims the Word in the Liturgy, she welcomes it as a way in which Christ is present" (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments: *Varietates legitimae* [VL], 23). It is Christ "Himself who

speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in church" (SC 7).

Everyone in the Church needs to make progress in contact with the Bible: clerics, consecrated people and the lay faithful. The growing desire of many lay people to receive better and deeper biblical formation should be met with adequate programs. The translation of the Bible into the people's language is the first and indispensable step. People also need guidance individually and in groups in how to read, understand and pray the Bible. This is essential to a Catholic approach to the Bible, in which it is clearly understood that it is the Church which presents the Bible to the faithful, explaining its significance in the light of the Tradition that goes back to the Lord's Apostles. Liturgical experts and pastors should help people to see how selected biblical texts fit into specific liturgical celebrations. Homilies should also be rich in biblical foundations.

4. Translation. Adaptation. Inculturation.

The Second Vatican Council introduced the vernacular into the Liturgy and also allowed for properly considered adaptations and inculturation in the rites. This poses a considerable challenge and requires careful consideration.

While retaining Latin as the language in the Latin rite, the Council appreciated the usefulness of the use of the mother tongue among the various peoples of the world (cf. SC 36).

Since the Council, the use of the mother tongue has become so widened and general that many priests now find it not easy to celebrate Mass in Latin. Vatican II did not abolish Latin. It would be good that occasionally a parish sings the more popular parts of the Mass in Latin: think what this means in terms of preserving and respecting our patrimony, showing the Church as a community that has a memory, and facilitating international Eucharistic celebrations.

Liturgical translations into the mother tongue pose the demanding challenge of producing translations which are faithful to the Latin original, which are excellent literary productions, which can be set to music, which will stand the test of time and which will nourish the piety and spiritual sensitivity of the people. Dangers and abuses arise from *ex-tempore* translations, hurried works and illegitimate translations not approved by the Conference of Bishops and ratified by the Apostolic See.

When we go into the area of adaptation and inculturation of rites, we are faced with still more demanding challenges.

Sacrosanctum Concilium is very clear in its principles and directives. "Even in the Liturgy", it says, "the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or the good of the whole community. Rather she respects and fosters the spiritual adornments and gifts of the various races and peoples. Anything in their way of life that is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy and, if possible, preserves intact. Sometimes in fact she admits such things into the Liturgy itself, as long as they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit" (SC

37).

The carrying out of these directives will engage the Church for generations, especially in the countries of recent evangelization. To assist in this task the Holy See has issued extensive guidelines which explain the Council's intention and lay down detailed steps to be followed (cf *VL*). Provided that the substantial unity of the Roman rite is respected, the liturgical books allow for legitimate adaptations to different regions and people. It is always the national Bishops' Conference or its equivalent which gets the matter studied, voted on and passed on to Rome for the required recognitio (cf *SC* 38; *GIRM* 386-394).

When deeper inculturation is considered necessary, then many more demands are made: interdisciplinary study by theologians, and by experts in Liturgy, in literature, in anthropology and in music, discussion and voting by Bishops, and ratification by the Roman See (cf. *Ad Gentes* 22; *SC* 40; *VL* 6368; *GIRM* 395-399).

It is clear that whether in adaptation or inculturation, great care is needed to respect the mysteries of Christ which are celebrated in the Liturgy. Writing on the Holy Eucharist, Pope John Paul II says that "the treasure is too important and precious to risk impoverishment or compromise through forms of experimentation or practices introduced without a careful review on the part of the competent ecclesiastical authorities [and] because the Sacred Liturgy expresses and celebrates the faith professed by all, and being the heritage of the whole Church, cannot be determined by local Churches in isolation from the universal Church" (*EE* 51).

It is therefore reasonable and indeed obvious that there must be liturgical regulations and norms. With reference to the Holy Eucharist, for example, Pope John Paul II says that "these norms are a concrete expression of the authentically ecclesial nature of the Eucharist; this is their deepest meaning. Liturgy is never anyone's private property, be it of the celebrant or of the community" (*EE* 52). That is why *Sacrosanctum Concilium* already declared that the regulation of the Sacred Liturgy depends solely on the authority of the Church, that is, on the Apostolic See and, as laws may determine, on the Bishops and the Bishops' Conference. "Therefore, absolutely no other person, not even a priest, may add, remove, or change anything in the Liturgy on his own authority" (*SC* 22).

The danger is that some people seem to think that inculturation in the Liturgy encourages free and uncontrolled creativity. They imagine that according to Vatican II the progressive, modern and enlightened thing to do in liturgical celebrations is to be creative, to be original, to introduce something new, to do it yourself. Pope John Paul writes that "it must be lamented that, especially in the years following the post-conciliar liturgical reform, as a result of a misguided sense of creativity and adaptation, there have been a number of abuses which have been a source of suffering for many" (*EE* 52).

The truth is that genuine inculturation has nothing to do with the product of the over-fertile imagination of an enthusiastic priest who concocts something on Saturday night and inflicts it on the innocent Sunday morning congregation now being used as a guinea pig. True and lasting inculturation demands long study, discussions among experts in

interdisciplinary platforms, examination and decision by Bishops, *recognitio* from the Apostolic See and prudent presentation to the people of God. Moreover, it should be noted that in religious matters, people's sensitivity and piety can easily be hurt by ill-considered and hasty novelties. In religious practices, most people are understandably conservative in the good sense and unwilling to endure frequent changes.

Even when we give the hasty innovator the benefit of the doubt, that the motivation is a sincere attempt to bring the Liturgy home to the people, it remains true that the results are generally disastrous. Unapproved innovations distract and annoy the people. They often draw attention to the priest rather than to God. They generally do not last long. They are often superficial. And they scandalize because they run against Church norms and regulations. If many lay people had only one request to make, they would ask that the priest celebrate Mass, or other rites, simply according to the approved books. Many lay faithful complain that rarely do they find two priests celebrating the Eucharistic sacrifice in the same way. The Roman Liturgy is not a free-for-all experimentation field where each celebrant has the option to tag on his cherished accretions. Repeated and laid-down action is part of ritual. The people are not tired of it, as long as the celebrant is full of faith and devotion and has the proper *ars celebrandi* (art of how to celebrate).

Pope John Paul II laments that "some have promoted outlandish innovations, departing from the norms issued by the authority of the Apostolic See or the Bishops, thus disrupting the unity of the Church and the piety of the faithful and even on occasion contradicting matters of faith" (*VQA* 11). "It cannot be tolerated", he continues, "that certain priests should take upon themselves the right to compose Eucharistic Prayers or to substitute profane readings for texts from Sacred Scripture. Initiatives of this sort, far from being linked with the liturgical reform as such, or with the books which have issued from it, are in direct contradiction to it, disfigure it and deprive the Christian people of the genuine treasures of the Liturgy of the Church" (*VQA* 13).

It is therefore clear that inculturation does not encourage banalization or trivialization of the Sacred Liturgy. Spontaneity run wild can manifest itself in many ways.

At the beginning of Mass the priest can trivialize by amusing the people on the weather, by saying "Good morning everybody" instead of "The Lord be with you" or "The grace of Our Lord...", which are the proper liturgical opening greetings. He can banalize by an exaggerated autobiographical introduction and trite jokes in his misguided effort to warm the people up for worship! He may not realize that he is now drawing attention to himself instead of to God and the liturgical celebration of the day.

Other distractions and even desecralizations can come through dances that offend against good sense and do not help to raise people's mind to God, loquacious and unnecessary commentaries, over-dosage of singing monopolized by the choir which allows no time for personal prayer, and the introduction of bizarre vestments and unacceptable vessels for the Holy Eucharist.

We have dwelt somewhat long on inculturation because the experience of many is that it

is often misunderstood and offended against. But genuine inculturation is what Holy Mother Church wants. And the challenge before us is to promote it and not to allow the cockle to grow among the wheat.

5. Active Participation

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council stress the importance of the active participation of all the faithful in liturgical celebrations. "Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the Liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people' (I Pet 2:9; cf 2:4-4), is their right and duty by reason of their Baptism" (SC 14).

For this to be possible, the clerics must themselves be properly formed in the Liturgy. So should religious personnel, catechists and other pastoral agents. No one can give what the person does not have.

It is important to realize that the internal aspect of participation is indispensable as a basis, a requirement and the aim of all external participation. That is why personal prayer, Scriptural meditation and moments of silence are necessary. "The Sacred Liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church. Before people come to the Liturgy they must be called to faith and to conversion" (SC 9). It is highly advisable to promote moments of silence for individual reflection and prayer during the Eucharistic celebration, at such times as after each reading, and after the homily and Holy Communion. Choirs should resist the temptation to fill every available quiet time with singing.

A sense of reverence and devotion is conducive to interiorized active participation. Prominent among those who influence the congregation in this matter is the priest celebrant. But the altar servers, the readers, the choir and the extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion where they are really needed, do also influence the people by every move of theirs. Reverence is the exterior manifestation of faith. It should show our sense of adoration of God most holy and most high. And our belief in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist should come across in how the ministers handle the Blessed Sacrament, how they genuflect and how they recite the prescribed prayers.

Liturgical music promotes worship. The Gregorian chant has an honored place in the history of the Latin rite. It is to be noted that even the young people today do appreciate it. Most liturgical singing will understandably be in the mother tongue. The Diocesan or National Music Commission should see that such texts are suitable from the theological and musical points of view before they are approved for Church use.

The Roman Missal wisely notes the importance of common gestures by the worshipping congregation (cf *GIRM* 42-44). Examples are times for the congregation to stand, kneel or sit. Bishops' Conferences can and do make some specifications. Care should be taken not to appear like regimenting the congregation, as if it were an army. Some flexibility should be allowed, more so as it is easy to hurt people's Eucharistic sensitivity with

reference, for example, to kneeling or standing.

Church architecture also influences active participation. If a church is built and the seats are arranged as in an amphitheater or as in a banquet, the undeclared emphasis may be horizontal attention to one another, rather than vertical attention to God. In this sense the celebration of Mass facing the people demands from the priest and altar servers a high level of discipline, so that as from the offertory of the Mass it be seen clearly that both priest and people are turned toward God, not toward one another. We come to Mass primarily to adore God, not to affirm one another, although this is not excluded.

Some people think that liturgical renewal means the removal of kneelers from church pews, the knocking down of altar rails or the positioning of the altar in the middle of the sitting area of the people. The Church has never said any such thing. Nor does liturgical restoration mean iconoclasm or the removal of all statues and sacred images. These should be displayed, albeit with good judgment. And the altar of the Blessed Sacrament should be outstanding for its beauty and honored prominence, otherwise in some so-called restored churches one could rightly lament: "They have taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they have put Him" (Jn 20:13).

When the liturgy is so celebrated that everyone can properly take part, the people are offered a number one opportunity to draw from the primary Christian fountain for their spiritual growth.

6. Lay Liturgical Roles

For proper celebration of the Sacred Liturgy and fruitful participation in it by all Christ's faithful, it is important to understand the roles proper to the ministerial or ordained priest and those proper to the lay faithful.

Christ is the priest, the high priest. He gives all baptized people a share in this role of offering God gifts. The common priesthood of all the baptized gives people the capacity to offer Christian worship, to offer Christ to the Eternal Father through the hands of the ordained priest at the Eucharistic celebration, to receive the sacraments and to live holy lives and by self-denial and active charity make of their entire lives a sacrifice.

The ministerial priest, on the other hand, is a man chosen from among the baptized and ordained by the Bishop to the Sacrament of Holy Orders. He alone can consecrate bread into the Body of Christ and wine into the Blood of Christ and offer to the Eternal Father in the name of Christ and the whole Christian people. (cf Council of Trent: On Eccl. Hierarchy and Ordination 4, in *DS*, 1767-1770). It is clear that, though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of all the baptized and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are closely related (cf *Lumen Gentium* 10).

The major challenge is to help the lay faithful appreciate their dignity as baptized persons. On this follows their role at the Eucharistic sacrifice and other liturgical acts. They are the people of God. They are insiders. Their share as readers of lessons, as leaders of song and as the people offering with and through the priest is based on

Baptism. The high point is when they communicate at the Eucharistic table. This crowns their participation at the Eucharistic sacrifice.

There should be no attempt to clericalize the laity. This could happen when, for example, lay people chosen as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion no longer see this role as being called on to help when the ordinary ministers (bishop, priest and deacon) are not available in sufficient numbers to cope with the high number of communicants. When the extraordinary ministers see their role as a power display to show that what the priest can do, the lay faithful can do too, then we have a problem. How else can we explain the sad error of the lay faithful struggling around the altar to open the tabernacle or to grab the sacred vessels -- all against sane liturgical norms and pure good sense?

We have also the opposite mistake of trying to laicize the clergy. When the priest no longer wishes to bless the people with the formula "May Almighty God bless you", but prefers the seemingly democratic wording, "May Almighty God bless us", then we have a confusion of roles. The same thing happens when some priests think that they should not concelebrate a Mass but should just participate as lay people in order to show more solidarity with the lay faithful. "In liturgical celebrations", says *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, "whether as a minister or as one of the faithful, each person should perform his role by doing solely and totally what the nature of things and liturgical norms require of him" (SC 28).

A task always to be attended to is the theological, liturgical and spiritual formation of extraordinary ministers of the Holy Eucharist, of catechists, of other pastoral agents and of the lay faithful in general. Often mistakes are not due to bad will but due to lack of knowledge. It is then that political models of power sharing and power struggle begin to smuggle themselves into the sanctuary. Members of Diocesan and National Liturgical Commissions are to be thanked and encouraged for all that they do to bring in more light and therefore more harmony.

7. Revitalization of Church Life Through the Liturgy

In *Vicesimus Quintus Annus*, Pope John Paul II thanks God "for the radiant vitality of so many Christian communities, a vitality drawn from the wellspring of the Liturgy" (VQA 12). There is no doubt that *Sacrosanctum Concilium* has continued to sustain the Church along the paths of holiness for fostering genuine liturgical life. This re-emphasizes why it is ever important to see that the Council's genuine directives are followed.

It is a fact that as the Pope says, "some have received the new books with a certain indifference, or without trying to understand the reasons for the changes; others, unfortunately, have turned back in a one-sided and exclusive way to the previous liturgical forms which some of them consider to be the sole guarantee of certainty in the faith" (VQA 11). It must not be presumed that most priests, consecrated people or lay faithful are well informed on the reformed books of the Liturgy these thirty years. Ongoing formation continues to be necessary.

Moreover we have to note that the Liturgy of the Church goes beyond the liturgical

reform. Many young priests, consecrated brothers and sisters and lay faithful are not conversant with the liturgical books of fifty years ago, either because they were born after Vatican II, or because they were infants when it was celebrated.

What is above all needed is "an ever deeper grasp of the Liturgy of the Church, celebrated according to the current books and lived above all as a reality in the spiritual order" (*VQA* 14). Under the direction of their Bishops, Diocesan and National Liturgical Commissions are to be encouraged to continue their work along these lines. Moreover, Catholic universities and higher institutes, seminaries, religious formation houses, and pastoral and catechetical centers also have their role to play. There should be a specific aim of promoting widespread formation of the lay faithful in the theology and spirituality of the liturgy.

Devotion to and veneration of the Holy Eucharist outside Mass also have their place. Liturgy promoters must not give the impression that attention to the Holy Eucharist ends with Mass. For centuries, Catholic practice in the Latin rite has held dear visits to the Most Blessed Sacrament, Eucharistic Benediction, Procession and Congress, and Eucharistic Adoration protracted for one hour, or for the whole day, or for forty hours (cf *DC* 3; *EE* 25; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [*CCC*], 1378-1379).

"Popular devotions of the Christian people are warmly commended, provided that they accord with the laws and norms of the Church" (*SC* 13). The Directory [on Popular Piety and the Liturgy] published by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in 2002 will be found to be of great help in understanding and guiding these devotions so that they agree perfectly with the Catholic faith, lead to and emanate from liturgical worship and continue to contribute to the life of holiness of the people of God (cf. *CCC* 1674-1676; *VQA* 18).

8. Looking Toward the Future

As we come to the close of these reflections, it would be good to take a look at the future. A few points of reference are proposed.

The role of the Diocesan Bishop is irreplaceable. "The Bishop is to be considered the high priest of his flock. In a certain sense it is from him that the faithful who are under his care derive and maintain their life in Christ. Therefore all should hold in very high esteem the liturgical life of the diocese which centers around the Bishop, especially in his cathedral church" (*SC* 41). This truth imposes a heavy responsibility on the Bishop and also calls on the people to recognize his role and to respect and follow his liturgical leadership.

It is normal for Bishops to form Diocesan or National Liturgical Commissions for the carrying out of the liturgical apostolate. Members of such bodies should strive to absorb the genuine Catholic faith and spirit and to avoid pushing private or personal agendas through the Commissions. It is obvious that appropriate relations with the diocesan office, the Bishop's Conference or the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments should be fostered. Liturgical Commissions should guard

against making too many regulations for the people or ignoring directives from higher authorities. When adaptations and inculturated changes by the Church in a country get so many that the Roman rite is somewhat obscured, the fault may lie not just on the Bishops, but also on their Liturgical Commissions and other liturgical experts who advise the Bishops.

The role of the parish priest remains very important. He is the official representative of the Church nearest to most of the faithful. His liturgical formation, his ideas and the way he celebrates the Mass, the other sacraments and the rest of the Liturgy, affect most of his people. Whatever can be done to help the parish priest to rise to the height of his calling is to be encouraged.

Church architecture, earlier mentioned in this paper, is so important that I would like to return to it here. The shape of the church building has its importance. As someone has said, a gym that looks like a church is still a gym.

Some questions can be of help. Does this church building help to raise people's minds to God, to the transcendent? Where are the tower, the bell, the Cross? Within the church, is the sanctuary clearly distinguished from the rest of the church? Why were the beautiful altar rails that have been there for one or two centuries removed against the wishes of many of the parishioners?

Why is it so difficult to make out where the tabernacle is located? Where is Our Blessed Mother's statue or image? Is iconoclasm back?

I am aware that the renovation of church buildings can be a contentious issue. Bishops and members of Liturgical Commissions have the delicate task of weighing all sides of the question. But before the hammer or compressor machine is applied to objects that have touched the devotional sensitivity of the people for decades or even centuries, those who have to take the decision cannot avoid asking themselves whether there are reasons weighty enough to upset so many people and ask the parish or diocese to pay for the exercise.

My dear brothers and sisters engaged in the promotion of the Sacred Liturgy throughout the dioceses of this great and vast country, I thank you on behalf of the Holy Father and of the Congregation for the Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments for your important apostolate. I rejoice with you for all the graces which have come to the Catholic community through your work. May the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Our Savior, obtain for you the grace to continue your ecclesial service in joy, peace and grace, and in the comforting assurance that you are thereby fulfilling a vital role in the mission of the Church.

Francis Cardinal Arinze
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