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Letter of the Cardinal Secretary of State for the 70th National Liturgical Week on the theme: “Liturgy: a call for all to baptismal sanctity”

The following is the letter send by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin to H.E. Msgr. Claudio Maniago, bishop of Castellaneta and president of the Centre of Liturgical Action on the occasion of the seventieth National Liturgical Week, taking place in Messina, Italy, from 26 to 29 August 2019 on the theme: “Liturgy: a call for all to baptismal sanctity”:

Letter of His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin

Vatican City, 16 August 2019

Reverend Excellency,

I am glad to convey the cordial well wishes of the Holy Father Francis to you, to H.E. Rev. Msgr. Giovanni Accolla, archbishop of Messina-Lipari-Santa Maria del Mela, and to those who are taking part in the National Liturgical Week, whose uninterrupted journey is now reaching its seventieth year. It is significant to remember how, passing from diocese to diocese throughout the Italian peninsula, this initiative has been able to prepare, to accompany, to make known and to further the path of liturgical renewal desired by Vatican Council I, as Pope Francis acknowledged, underlining that “this is still the commitment that I ask of you today: to help the ordained ministers, as well as other ministers, cantors, artists, musicians, to cooperate so that the liturgy may be the “font and the summit of the vitality of the Church (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10)” (*Address to Participants in the 68th National Liturgical Week*, 24 August 2017).

The ecclesial sensibility of the Centre of Liturgical Action and the pastoral solicitude of the host archdiocese have converged in the need to place holiness at the centre of the reflection of the annual appointment: “Liturgy: a call for all to baptismal sanctity. ‘Chosen that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love’ (Eph 1: 4)”. Recently Pope Francis wished to draw the attention of all believers to this fundamental truth of Christian faith and life, highlighted by the Council Fathers (cf. *Lumen gentium*, 9: 40), with the aim to “re-propose the call to

holiness in a practical way for our own time, with all its risks, challenges and opportunities” (Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*, 2).

The theme of holiness immediately and directly calls the liturgy into question. Pope Francis recalled in the aforementioned audience that “the liturgy is ‘living’ by reason of the living presence of the One Who ‘by dying He has destroyed our death, and by rising, restored our life (Preface I of Easter)”, and that “the liturgy is life for the entire people of the Church”. Indeed, Vatican Council II teaches that “Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations” and that “Christ indeed always associated the Church with Himself in this great work wherein God is perfectly glorified and men are sanctified. The Church is His beloved Bride who calls to her Lord, and through Him offers worship to the Eternal Father”. And furthermore, “Rightly, then, the liturgy is considered as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. In the liturgy the sanctification of the man is signified by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which corresponds with each of these signs; in the liturgy the whole public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and His members” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7). The Council Fathers insist on the fact that the liturgy, in the moment in which sanctity is celebrated, sanctifies those who participate in it and in this way glorify the holy and ineffable Name. The sanctity welcomed and celebrated in the liturgy demonstrates the transcendence of God, three times holy, the Most High, the Almighty, “the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kinds and Lord of lords, Who alone is immortal and Who lives in unapproachable light” (1 Tm 6: 15-16), but in the liturgy, in continuity with the Incarnation, the “Divine majesty” is offered in closeness to man. Indeed, the liturgy is the sacramental implementation of the Covenant of the Father with mankind in the Son, the Word made flesh, to allow men to live His same life, making them sons of the Son and the living temple of the Spirit. In the liturgy, the unapproachable sanctity of God is turned into tangible proximity in Christ and in Him one is present and communicates with the face of mercy, of *agape* of the freely-given love that the Father pours into the heart of believers through the gift of the Spirit (cf. Rm 5: 5).

The Holy Father hopes that from the celebrations and reflections of the Week there may ripen the awareness that the liturgy is the privileged place in which God’s sanctity draws us to Him with its beauty, its truth and its goodness. Particularly in the Eucharist, the Holy Spirit lets us enter into the Paschal mystery, granting us to pass with Christ from death to life, it makes us participants in the divine life that, when accepted, transfigures all our mortal being, making it capable of loving *like* Him, offering one’s own life in service to our brothers (cf. *Catechesis* of 22 November 2017). “For life to be truly a praise pleasing to God, it is indeed necessary to change the heart. Christian conversion is oriented to this conversion, which is an encounter of life with the ‘God of the living’ (Mt. 22: 32). ... The liturgy is an experience extended to the conversion of life through the assimilation of the Lord’s way of thinking and behaving ... life that forms ... A living treasure that cannot be reduced to tastes, recipes and currents, but which should be welcomed with docility and promoted with love, as irreplaceable nourishment for the organic growth of the People of God. The liturgy is not the field of ‘do-it-yourself’, but the epiphany of ecclesial communion. Therefore, ‘we’ and not ‘I’ resounds in prayers and gestures; the real community, not the ideal subject” (*Address to participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*, 14 February 2019).

The task that awaits you is therefore precious: spreading among the People of God the splendour of the living mystery of the Lord, made manifest in the liturgy, with a liturgical formation intended to enable everyone to become aware of the indispensable role of the liturgy in and for the Church. In a practical sense, it means helping communities to internalize better the prayer of the Church, to love it as an experience of encounter with the Lord and with brothers, and in the light of this, to rediscover its content observe its rites. The liturgy will be authentic, that is, able to form and transform those who participate in it, if the latter, pastors and laypeople, learn increasingly well to grasp its meaning and symbolic language, including art, hymns and music at the service of the mystery celebrated, also including silence. *Mystagogy* is shown to be the most suitable way of entering in this path, in which one learns to welcome with wonder the new life received through the Sacraments and to renew it continually with joy (cf. *ibid*).

The Holy Father assures you of his special remembrance in prayer, so that the work of these days may bring good and abundant fruits for the journey of the Churches that are in Italy and, as he asks for remembrance in your prayers, he wholeheartedly imparts a special blessing to the bishops, priests, deacons, men and women religious, and laypeople present, as well as to the speakers, entrusting you all to the maternal protection of Mary,

Mother of the Church.

In adding my personal good wishes, I wish to take this opportunity to convey my respectful greeting to Your Reverend Excellency.

Devotedly in the Lord

Cardinal Pietro Parolin
Secretary of State
