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SACRED CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

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LETTER TO THE PRESIDENTS
OF THE
NATIONAL CONFERENCES
OF
BISHOPS CONCERNING
EUCHARISTIC PRAYERS

Eucharistiae Participationem

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SACRED CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP

Letter to the Presidents of National Conferences of Bishops, Concerning Eucharistic Prayers

1. The primary objective of liturgical renewal is the participation of the people in the Eucharist knowingly, devoutly and actively.¹ This is especially true of the revision of the Roman Missal, recently put into effect according to the norms of the Second Vatican Council.²

It must be acknowledged that the distinguishing characteristic of this Missal, promulgated by authority of Pope Paul VI, is the large number of texts that offer a wide variety in selecting the scriptural readings, songs, prayers and acclamations available to the entire community, as well as in the *presidential* prayers. The eucharistic prayer is no exception, for in addition to the venerable and traditional Roman Canon, three new texts have also been introduced into use.³

2. The reason why such a variety of texts has been offered, and the end result such new formularies were meant to achieve, are pastoral in nature: namely, to reflect the unity and diversity of liturgical prayer. By using the various texts contained in the Roman Missal, various Christian communities, as they gather to celebrate the Eucharist, are able to sense that they themselves form the one Church praying with the same faith, using the same prayer. They furthermore become one in their ability of proclaiming the same mystery of Christ in different ways—especially when the vernacular is used. Each of the faithful can more easily lift their hearts to God in prayer and thanks,⁴ and share in the celebrations with greater spiritual benefits.

3. Although several years have passed since the promulgation of the revised Roman Missal, it has not yet been fully introduced everywhere, since the vast work of providing vernacular editions

for so many countries has required a considerable period of time.⁵ Furthermore the many ways of increasing the pastoral effectiveness of a celebration are not always known, nor is sufficient attention paid to the spiritual good of the assembly in planning the celebration.⁶

4. In addition many have voiced the desire of adapting the eucharistic celebrations further with the composition of new formularies, including new eucharistic prayers. They maintain that the options among the *presidential* prayers and the four eucharistic prayers of the Order of Mass still do not fully satisfy the many demands of various groups, areas and peoples. This Sacred Congregation has received several requests to approve, or grant the faculty of approving, and to allow the use of new texts for prayers and eucharistic prayers in modern language and thought-patterns.

In the past few years many authors from different countries, representing many language groups, have published eucharistic prayers composed by themselves for such purposes. In spite of the limitations imposed by the Second Vatican Council⁷ and the prohibitions of individual bishops, priests have frequently used privately circulated texts for their celebrations.

5. Consequently this Sacred Congregation, at the request of the Holy Father and in consultation with experts from various parts of the world, has carefully studied the question of the composition of new eucharistic prayers or of giving the faculty to episcopal conferences for such approval, together with other questions connected with such prayers and their consequences. The results of this study, made by the members of this Congregation in plenary session, together with the decisions of other Sacred Congregations having competence in such matters, were presented to the Pope. Upon mature consideration of the entire matter, it does not seem advisable at this time to grant episcopal conferences the general faculty of either composing or approving new eucharistic prayers. On the contrary it seems more advisable to recommend that a broader catechesis be undertaken concerning the nature and purpose of a eucharistic prayer.⁸ Since it is indeed the center of the celebration, it should also be central to a fuller catechesis. It seems necessary to provide priests with a more detailed instruction on the possibilities they have to encourage the full participa-

tion of the people by using the existing norms found in liturgical legislation and the formularies of the Roman Missal.

6. The four eucharistic prayers presently appearing in the revised Roman Missal remain, and no other eucharistic prayers composed without the express approval or permission of the Holy See may be used. Episcopal conferences and individual bishops are strongly asked to lead their priests in a reasonable way to maintain the one practice of the Roman Church. This will result in the good of the Church as well as preserve the arrangement proper to liturgical celebrations.

The Holy See is motivated by a pastoral love of unity in reserving to itself the right of regulating so important a matter as the order of the eucharistic prayer. In preserving the unit of the Roman rite it will not refuse to consider legitimate requests, and will give willing consideration to such requests received from episcopal conferences for new eucharistic prayers to be composed for particular needs and introduced into the liturgy. It will also set forth those norms to be observed in each individual case.

7. Together with this important decision, it seems useful to suggest several considerations which render its meaning and execution easier to understand. Some of these relate to the nature and importance of the eucharistic prayer in liturgical tradition, especially the Roman tradition. The rest take into account what can be done to accommodate a celebration to individual groups without changing the text of the eucharistic prayers.

8. By its very nature the eucharistic prayer is the "center of the entire celebration," and "a prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification" whereby "the entire congregation of believers join Christ in acknowledging the works of God and offering the sacrifice."⁹ This prayer is proclaimed by the presiding priest. He expresses the voice of God as it is addressed to the people, and the voice of the people as they turn to God. He alone should proclaim this prayer, while those assembled for the sacred celebration observe a reverent silence.

Besides its catechetical nature which attempts to clarify all that is proper to each particular celebration, the prominent feature of this prayer is one of thanksgiving for the universal mystery of salvation, or for some particular aspect of that mystery cele-

brated within the liturgical action in keeping with the day, feast or season.¹⁰

To allow those participating to praise God and give him even greater thanks, the revised Roman Missal already contains a "great number of prefaces, derived from the older tradition of the Roman Church or newly composed. In this way the different aspects of the mystery of salvation will be emphasized, and there will be richer themes of thanksgiving."¹¹

To this same end, the presiding priest has the faculty of briefly introducing the eucharistic prayer.¹² He can thereby suggest reasons for giving thanks which are there and then meaningful to a particular group of people. The community will then be able to feel that its own life is an intimate part of the history of salvation, and so draw greater benefits from their eucharistic celebration.

9. As for the very purpose of the eucharistic prayer and its inner meaning or structure, there is a secondary aspect of petition or intercession. The revised liturgy provides this notably in the general intercessions, in a form that is much freer and more adaptable to varying circumstances, expressing supplications for the needs of the Church and all mankind. The new liturgical books supply many formats for this type of intercession for insertion into the eucharistic prayers, as the structure of each allows. They are to be used in particular celebrations, especially during ritual Masses.¹³ In this way the purpose of each celebration becomes more clearly defined, while at the same time signifying that this prayer is offered in union with the whole Church.¹⁴

10. The variations listed above permit the elements of thanksgiving and intercessions to be more closely related with the celebration as a whole. In order to develop the particular aspect of the mystery of Christ that is celebrated on special solemnities during the liturgical year, the Roman tradition has other special formularies for use (*infra actionem*).¹⁵

As is evident, the same tradition makes proper provision for the immutability of the text as a whole, while not excluding any appropriate variations. Thus the people can more readily associate themselves with the presiding priest with the frequent proclamation of the same texts. At the same time, the variations within

the text, however few in number, are not only useful but welcome, for they foster devotion and attentiveness, and embellish the prayer in a unique way.

In all that pertains to the principles found in Nos. 8-10, there is nothing to prevent episcopal conferences from providing similar variations for their own regions, and to request approval for them from the Holy See. The same holds true for a bishop in regard to the Proper for his diocese, and for the competent authority in regard to the Proper for each religious family.

11. The ecclesial dimension of the eucharistic celebration should be considered paramount. While it is within such a celebration that "the unity of all believers who form one body in Christ is both expressed and brought about,"¹⁶ the "celebration of Mass is, in itself, a profession of faith whereby the entire Church recognizes and expresses her own nature."¹⁷ Nowhere is this more apparent than in the eucharistic prayer, for there it is not just an individual person, nor even a local community, but "the one and only Catholic Church, existing in the local churches"¹⁸ that addresses itself to God.

Whenever eucharistic prayers are used without any approval of the Church's authority, unrest and even dissensions arise, not only among priests, but within the communities themselves, even though the Eucharist should be a "sign of unity, and the bond of charity."¹⁹ Many people complain about the overly subjective quality of such texts, and participants have a right to make such a complaint. Otherwise the eucharistic prayer, to which they give their assent in the "Amen" they proclaim, becomes disorderly, or is imbued with the personal feelings of the person who either composes or says it.

Hence it is necessary to demand that only those eucharistic prayers be used which have been approved by the lawful authority of the Church, for they clearly and fully manifest the sentiments of the Church.

12. Due to the very nature of the eucharistic prayer, a more precise adaptation for different groups or circumstances, and a more highly developed catechesis are not always possible nor suitable at that point of the celebration. They should be made, however, in those parts and formularies of the liturgical action which permit and call for variations.

13. For those who both prepare and participate in celebrations, the first variations to be kept in mind are those granted by the General Instruction of the Roman Missal.²⁰ In certain cases different formularies of the Mass may be chosen, together with additional texts for the various parts of the Mass, such as the readings, prayers and songs "so that they correspond to the needs, spiritual preparation, and attitude of the participants."²¹ It is also well to remember that other documents, promulgated since the publication of the Roman Missal, offer further norms and suggestions for preparing celebrations which are alive and planned according to pastoral need.²²

14. Among the possibilities for further accommodating any individual celebration, it is important to consider the admonitions, the homily and the general intercessions.

First of all are the admonitions. These enable the people to be drawn into a fuller understanding of the sacred action, or any of its parts, and lead them into a true spirit of participation. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal entrusts the more important admonitions to the priest for preparation and use. He may introduce the Mass to the people before the celebration begins, during the liturgy of the word prior to the actual readings, and in the eucharistic prayer before the preface; he may also conclude the entire sacred action before the dismissal.²³ The Order of Mass provides others as well, which are important to certain portions of the rite, such as during the penitential rite, or before the Lord's Prayer. By their very nature these brief admonitions do not require that everyone use them in the form in which they appear in the Missal. Provision can be made in certain cases that they be adapted to some degree to the varying circumstances of the community. In all cases it is well to remember the nature of an admonition, and not make them into a sermon or homily; care should be taken to keep them brief and not too wordy, for otherwise they become tedious.

15. In addition to the admonitions, the homily must be kept in mind, for it is "part of the liturgy itself."²⁴ It proclaims the Word of God in the liturgical gathering for the community assembled. It explains that Word in view of the total celebration respecting the ability of the people to understand and in terms of their daily life.

16. Importance must also be accorded to the general intercessions as a means of allowing the community to respond to the Word of God as it has been explained and received. To be effective, the petitions that are made for the needs of all men everywhere should win the assent of the people gathered locally. Insight and a certain freedom should go into the composition of these intercessions, for they are both essential to the very nature of this prayer.

17. In addition to the selection of appropriate texts, a truly living and communal celebration requires the president and all other ministers to carefully examine different forms of verbal communication with the congregation; this refers to the readings, homily, admonitions, introductions, and similar parts.²⁵

When the priest says a prayer, especially a eucharistic prayer, he should not only avoid a dry, monotonous style of delivery, but an overly subjective and emotional way of speaking and acting as well. As he presides over the liturgical action, whether by reading, singing, or by use of gestures, he should carefully help the participants achieve a true sense of community as they celebrate and live the memorial of the Lord.

18. A sacred silence must be observed at the proper times,²⁶ in order that texts may achieve their full effect and enable the greatest possible spiritual benefits to be gained. As an integral part of the liturgical action, the nature of this silence and the time when it is introduced allow individuals to become recollected, or to meditate briefly upon what they have heard, or to pray and praise God in their hearts.²⁷

19. Considering all this, it is hoped that pastors would take greater care to instruct their people, rather than introduce novelties into the texts and rites of the sacred action. This will enable them to understand better the nature, structure and elements of celebration, particularly the eucharistic prayer, and to take part in each celebration more fully and with greater awareness. The sacred liturgy does not draw its force and effectiveness from what is new and optional alone, but from sharing more deeply in the mystery of salvation which is truly present and operative within the liturgical action. As people profess one faith and express one prayer to God they will not only be able to work out their own salvation, but will also share it with all his brothers and sisters.

This circular letter was prepared by the Sacred Congregation, and His Holiness, Pope Paul VI, approved its contents on April 18, 1973, ordering its publication.

From the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, April 27, 1973.

Arthur Cardinal Tabera,
Prefect

✠ A. Bugnini,
Titular Bishop of Diocletian,
Secretary

NOTES

¹ See II Vatican Council, const. on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, art. 48: AAS 56 (1964), 113.

² See Paul VI, apost. const. *Missale Romanum*, April 3, 1969: AAS 61 (1969), 217-222.

³ See *ibid.*, p. 219.

⁴ See *Institutio generalis Missalis Romani*, no. 54.

⁵ As regards the principles governing translations, see Consilium for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Instruction sur la traduction des textes liturgiques pour la celebration avec le peuple*, January 25, 1969: *Notitiae* 5, 1969, 3-12.

⁶ See *Institutio generalis Missalis Romani*, no. 313.

⁷ See II Vatican Council, const. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 22, para. 3: AAS 56 (1964), 106.

⁸ See Benno Cardinal Gut, Letter to Presidents of Episcopal Conferences, June 2, 1968: *Notitiae* 4, 1968, 146-148: *Indications pour faciliter le catechese des anaphores de la Messe: ibid.*, 148-155.

⁹ *Institutio generalis Missalis*, no. 54.

¹⁰ See *ibid.*, no. 55a.

¹¹ Paul VI, apost. const. *Missale Romanum*, April 3, 1969: AAS 61 (1969), 219.

¹² See *Institutio generalis Missalis Romani*, no. 11.

¹³ As regards Eucharistic Prayer I, or the Roman Canon, apart from permission for introducing names into the remembrances of the living and the dead, see the special remembrances for godparents in the Mass of Christian Initiation for Adults and the formulas for the *Hanc igitur* from the Mass of the Easter Vigil up to the Second Sunday of Easter, in Masses for adult converts or adult baptisms, for those being confirmed or ordained, for bride and groom, newly professed religious, and the Consecration of Virgins; as regards Eucharistic Prayers II, III, and IV, see the embolisms for adult converts, newly professed religious, and for the Consecration of Virgins.

¹⁴ See *Institutio generalis Missalis Romani*, no. 55g.

¹⁵ See the proper *Communicantes* for Christmas and its octave for Epiphany, for Masses from the Easter Vigil up to the Second Sunday of Easter, on the Ascension of the Lord, and for Pentecost.

¹⁶ II Vatican Council, const. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 3: AAS 57 (1965), 6.

¹⁷ Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, *Instruction In quibus rerum circumstantiis*, June 1, 1972, no. 2b: AAS 64 (1972), 520.

¹⁸ See II Vatican Council, const. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 23: AAS 57 (1965), 27.

¹⁹ Augustine, *In Ioannis Evangelium Tractatus* 26, 13: CCL 36, 266; See II Vatican Council, const. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 47: AAS 56 (1964), 113.

²⁰ See *Institutio generalis Missalis Romani*, no. 314-324.

²¹ *Ibid.*, no. 313.

²² See S. Congr. for Divine Worship, *Instruction Actio Pastoralis*, May 15, 1969: AAS 61 (1969), 806-811; *Instruction Memoriale Domini*, May 29, 1969: AAS 61 (1969), 541-547; *Instruction Sacramentali Communione*, June 29, 1970: AAS 62 (1970), 664-667.

²³ See *Institutio generalis Missalis Romani*, no. 11.

²⁴ II Vatican Council, const. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 52: AAS 56 (1964), 114.

²⁵ See *Institutio generalis Missalis Romani*, no. 18.

²⁶ See II Vatican Council, const. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 30: AAS 56 (1964), 108; Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction *Musicam Sacram*, March 5, 1967, no. 17: AAS 59 (1967), 305.

²⁷ See *Institutio generalis Missalis Romani*, no. 23.