



# NewsLetter

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## Thoughtful Challenges Presented by *Verbum Domini*

On September 30, 2010, Pope Benedict XVI issued the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*. In presenting the results of the 12th Synod of Bishops from October 5-26, 2008, the purpose of the Exhortation was fourfold: 1) to rediscover the word of God as a source of renewal for the Church; 2) to promote the Bible among Priests; 3) to give support for the New Evangelization and ecumenical dialogue; and 4) to foster greater love for the word of God. This reflection wishes to focus on some of the challenges presented in Part Two, *Verbum in Ecclesia*. Some aspects contained in this section are well known, but their restatement may provide new motivation for the Church in the United States to more faithfully hear and proclaim the word of God.

### **The Word of God in the Church's Liturgy**

The Holy Father describes the liturgy as “the privileged setting in which God speaks to us in the midst of our lives; he speaks today to his people, who hear and respond. Every liturgical action is by its very nature steeped in sacred Scripture” (no. 52). The astounding thing about the word is that it has the ability to change and transform us if we are open to its power. The word of God and the liturgy are closely intertwined, and each leads to the other. As one enters into the word of God and contemplates its meaning, “[a] faith-filled understanding of sacred Scripture must always refer back to the liturgy, in which the word of God is celebrated as a timely and living word” (no. 52, emphasis original).

Two topics that are always in need of catechetical explanation are the relationship between sacred Scripture and the sacraments, and the sacramentality of God's word. In understanding this relationship, one must be aware of the performative character of God's word in the liturgy as well as its sacramentality. The word of God does not merely communicate information, but rather, this living word can make things happen and is life-changing. “In salvation history, there is no separation between what God says and what he does” (no. 53, emphasis original). The word of God commands a change in the very way we live our lives. The proclamation of the word entails an acknowledgement that Christ himself is present and speaks to us and that he wishes to be heard. After reflecting on the teachings of Saint Jerome, the Pope illustrates that “Christ, truly present under the species of bread and wine, is analogously present in the word proclaimed in the liturgy” (no. 56).

### **Practical Considerations**

After examining the role of God's word in the liturgy, the Pope turns his attention to practical applications of his teaching, and how the word might be strengthened in the celebration of the Mass, the sacraments, and the Liturgy of the Hours.

A special paragraph is given to the ministry of Reader. The Pope echoes the request of the Synod Fathers and asks that special training be given to those lay men and women who are called upon to read at Mass. “This training should be biblical and liturgical, as well as technical” (no. 58). In the Church in the United States, many dioceses offer workshops in which such training is provided, as well as a number of diverse resources. While this is laudable and should be maintained, this paragraph challenges all to examine if any new resources could be developed. Readers in parishes should also consider how they might renew their understanding about God’s word and how to successfully proclaim it. One concrete suggestion would be for lectors to hold a weekly celebration of the word of God at the parish, taking ample time to savor the meaning of the Lectionary readings and how they might be proclaimed at Mass.

It should be no surprise that in this Exhortation devoted to the word of God, the challenge of improving homilies is raised. The Synod Fathers recommended that homilists should always ask themselves these questions: “What are the Scriptures being proclaimed saying? What do they say to me personally? What should I say to the community in the light of its concrete situation?” (no. 59) In an effort to give concrete help to Priests in this matter, the Holy Father has directed the various offices of the Roman Curia to prepare and publish a Directory on Homiletics, “in which preachers can find useful assistance in preparing to exercise their ministry” (no. 60). With this resource, to be published in the next couple of years, fresh attention will be given to providing Priests in the United States with new ways to improve their art in proclaiming and explaining God’s word.

The Holy Father expressed concern that the relationship of the word of God with the sacraments of healing, namely Penance and the Anointing of the Sick, seems to be given little value. Since God’s word is one of reconciliation, the Pope exhorts penitents “to prepare for confession by meditating on a suitable text of sacred Scripture and to begin confession by reading or listening to a biblical exhortation such as those provided in the rite” (no. 61). It is also worth recalling that Appendix II of the Rite of Penance offers a number of sample penitential services, especially in Advent and Lent, that make good use of the word of God. The Scriptures also provide healing in times of illness. The Exhortation commends communal celebrations of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick – a not uncommon experience in parishes in the United States – and encourages its continuance. These celebrations allow for the consolation of knowing that the Incarnate Word “shouldered our pain and suffered out of love for us, thus giving meaning to sickness and death” (no. 61).

In times of praise and thanksgiving, and in times of sadness and anxiety, the word of God always has something to say. “[W]ith a view to making the People of God ever more familiar with the word of God in the context of liturgical actions or, in any event, with reference to them” (no. 64), the Holy Father offers several other liturgical suggestions for highlighting the transformative power of the word and letting it enrich our lives:

- Celebrations of the word of God are encouraged, particularly as part of liturgical formation, as preparation for the Sunday Eucharist, and as a time to pray and meditate on sacred Scripture. These types of celebrations are particularly recommended during Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter (see no. 65).
- The celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, particularly Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, ought to become more widespread among the lay faithful. Pastors should give emphasis to such public celebrations, particularly the First Vespers of Sundays and solemnities. Clergy and religious communities should promote the Liturgy of the Hours with the participation of the lay faithful (see no. 62).
- Whether during the Liturgy of the Word at Mass or at other occasions, the proclamation of the word of God “is to be celebrated in such a way as to promote meditation” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 56). Proclaiming the word of God also involves silence afterward, in order to allow the Holy Spirit to transform us in the Lord. In the Mass, sacred silence should take place before the Liturgy of the Word begins, after the First and Second Readings, and after the homily. Pastors are exhorted to foster moments of recollection so that the word of God can truly take root in people’s hearts (see no. 66).
- In the selection of songs for the liturgy, “[p]reference should be given to songs which are of clear biblical inspiration and which express, through the harmony of music and words, the beauty of God’s word” (no. 70). These words should give new impetus to composers, and also inspire all to make greater use of Gregorian chant, “songs handed down to us by the Church’s tradition” (no. 70). The 2007 guidelines document of the USCCB, *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*, can provide help in song selection.

- In churches, the ambo should be paid special attention through its clearly visible placement, beautiful design, and aesthetically harmonious decoration with the altar. Also, if possible, the sacred Scripture (either a Bible or book of the Lectionary) could be displayed in a place of honor in the church, even outside of liturgical celebrations. This placement should not compete, however, with the centrality of the tabernacle (see no. 68).
- Parishes should provide “every possible practical assistance” to those who are visually and/or hearing impaired, so that they too may actively participate in the liturgy and “experience a living contact with the word of the Lord” (no. 71).

A number of these suggestions have already taken root in the Church in the United States. This Exhortation provides encouragement to those parishes which have already implemented one or more of these ideas, and presents an opportunity for those who have not to better emphasize the word of God in parish life. These are but a few of the liturgical challenges which come to light in this Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation. They must be understood together with the other parts of *Verbum Domini*, but when these challenges are addressed, they have the potential to lead us to a deeper and more powerful appreciation of the tremendous mystery of God’s word among us. (The full Exhortation may be read at [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20100930\\_verbum-domini\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini_en.html).)

### **CDWDS Responds to Recent Liturgical *Dubia***

*Throughout the year 2009, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments responded to four liturgical dubia in the pages of its official journal, Notitiæ. Found in its volume 45 (2009), a summary of the four dubia, the issue and page references, and the responses of the Congregation is provided here:*

#### **The Bishop’s Participation at a Priest’s Jubilee**

The *dubium* asked whether it was licit for a Bishop to concelebrate at the jubilee Mass of one of his Priests, ceding the role of principal celebrant to the Priest celebrating his jubilee. The Congregation determined that this is not licit. While it is certainly appropriate for the jubilarian himself to function as the principal celebrant, the role of the Bishop in this case is to preside, and the norms found in the *Ceremonial of Bishops*, Chapter 3, nos. 175-185 (Mass at which the Bishop Presides but not as Celebrant), should be followed. The norms also permit that the bishop may participate “in choir” as described in the *Ceremonial* at no. 186: “If the bishop does not preside... he should participate in the Mass wearing the mozzetta and rochet, and at some suitable place other than the bishop’s chair (cathedra).” *(March-April 2009, pg. 170)*

#### **Role of Concelebrating Priests at the Doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer**

In this *dubium*, the question concerned the role of concelebrating Priests and whether they were permitted to take up the various chalices from the altar before the final doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer. Quoting from the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, the Congregation emphasized the proper role of the Deacon in holding up the chalice next to the Priest for the final doxology: “At the final doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer, the deacon stands next to the priest, holding the chalice elevated while the priest elevates the paten with the host, until the people have responded with the acclamation, *Amen*” (no. 180).

According to the Congregation’s response, “Therefore, the use is reprobated where all or many concelebrants at the altar proceed to take up the chalices at the time of the final doxology. Rather, it is the duty of the celebrant, or the deacon, or one concelebrant to elevate the [principal] chalice.” It is presumed by extension that the same could be said regarding the elevation of multiple ciboria or patens by various concelebrants. Given the response and the principles of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, only the main paten and the main chalice are to be elevated by the celebrant assisted by the Deacon, or in the absence of a Deacon, by a single concelebrant. *(March-April 2009, pg. 171)*

### **Multiple Principal or Secondary Patron Saints**

The Congregation also responded in the negative to the question of the appropriateness of naming two or more saints as principal, or even as secondary, patron saints. Citing the Congregation's 1973 Norms on patron saints, *Patronus, liturgica acceptione*, the response indicates simply "There may be only one patron" (cf. no. 5). There may be multiple patrons in the case of those saints who are listed together in the calendar, such as, for example, Saints Philip and James or Saints Cyril and Methodius.

The 1973 Norms do indicate, however, "In the past for special reasons another saint has sometimes been taken as a secondary patron. From now on as a rule there is to be only one" (no. 5). For those places or communities which had formally established secondary patrons in the past, they are to be observed as obligatory memorials (cf. no. 14). The Congregation also reiterated the principle that the Persons of the Trinity are not to be named as patrons. Only through an indult of the Holy See can a Blessed be named as a patron. (*May-June 2009, pg. 244*)

### **Bishops Receiving the Pastoral Staff at the Installation**

It has sometimes been the practice at the rite of reception (or "installation") of a Bishop (upon transfer from another See) to receive the pastoral staff (crozier) when he is first seated at the cathedra. The Congregation has determined that this gesture is not appropriate because the presentation of the pastoral staff is part of the Rite of Ordination, which should not be confused with the reception of a Bishop upon transfer to another See. The response to the *dubium* points out the norms for the Reception of the Bishop outlined in the *Ceremonial of Bishops*, no. 1145:

But the metropolitan may introduce the bishop into the cathedral church. In this case, at the doors of the church the metropolitan presents the bishop to the ranking member of the chapter and presides in the entrance procession. At the chair (cathedra) he greets the people and bids the apostolic letter to be shown and read to him. After this reading and the acclamation of the people, the metropolitan invites the bishop to sit in the chair (cathedra). Then the bishop rises, and, in keeping with the rubrics, the *Gloria* is sung.

It seems appropriate for the presiding Bishop, presumably the Metropolitan Archbishop, to carry the crozier in the entrance procession. Once the Metropolitan invites the Bishop to sit in the cathedra, the Bishop is simply handed the crozier (perhaps by a master of ceremonies) before approaching the cathedra.

(*November-December 2009, pg. 622*)



**The Members and Consultants of the  
Committee on Divine Worship  
and the Staff of the  
Secretariat of Divine Worship  
Wish You a Very Blessed Christmas  
and all Grace and Blessings  
for a Happy New Year 2011!**