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Archbishop Niederauer Reflects on *Communio* and the Liturgy, Part 2

During the June 2010 retreat assembly of the USCCB, San Francisco Archbishop George Niederauer, a member of the Committee on Divine Worship, offered a reflection on communio, emphasizing the Sacred Liturgy. For the benefit of our readers, the second part of his reflection is reprinted here with the Archbishop's permission (part 1 appeared in the May-June 2010 Newsletter):

We have considered both bishops and priests in the light of communion ecclesiology and their call to minister to the Church, the Body of Christ. Now it is important to consider them together, in relationship to each other and to the mission of ordained ministry in the Church. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, in *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, cited St. Ignatius of Antioch in the early Church, already asserting that priests are hierarchically united with the bishop in various ways and so make him present in a certain sense in individual assemblies of the faithful. The 1985 Synod document echoed this concept of the priests making the bishop present, going on to say that the priests, in doing so, assume and exercise in part in their daily work the bishop's tasks and his solicitude. Just as surely as each bishop makes present to his diocese the pastoral solicitude of the universal Church and its sovereign Pontiff, so does each priest make present in his parish the pastoral solicitude of the local bishop.

The 1985 Synod Fathers pointed out one particular instance of the witness and leadership of priests for which bishops were grateful at that moment in time: "Bishops feel themselves linked in gratitude to their priests, who in the post-conciliar period played a great part in implementing the Council, and they wish to be close with all their strength to their priests and to give them help and support in their often difficult work, especially in parishes."

The Council Fathers urged bishops to recognize the gift of the Holy Spirit that has been given to priests at their ordination, and accordingly to regard priests as their indispensable helpers and advisers in the ministry and in the task of teaching, sanctifying and shepherding the People of God. The 1985 Synod Fathers pointed out that, because of this unity in mission, friendly relations and full trust must exist between bishops and their priests. That statement calls to mind a challenging passage in the *Directory on the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops*: "The Bishop should consider it his sacred duty to know his diocesan priests well, their character, their aptitudes, their aspirations, the depth of their spiritual life, their zeal, their ideals, their state of health, their financial situation, their families and everything which concerns them" (no. 77).

Let's stop right there for a moment. I feel the need to grow parenthetical, because that last statement can sound so impossibly idealistic to our ears. Nevertheless, it states a goal toward which we bishops and priests are obliged to strive: friendly relations and full trust. Such striving has always been challenging—never more so than after the 2002 Dallas Charter. Still that is our call, a priority given us by the Church.

Also, it is fair to point out that our American culture features a bias against idealism. Here's the proof: When was the last time someone said to you, or you said to someone, "Oh, come on, be realistic"? Not long ago. When was the last time someone said to you, or you said to someone, "Oh, come on, be idealistic"? It's been a while. Yet the Gospel is always saying to us, "Oh, come on, be idealistic!" The Church is saying that too, in this matter of bishop/priest relationships. Consider the task before us in the implementation of the new edition of the *Roman Missal*: it is much more likely that we and our priests can be hopeful, resourceful and obedient together if we are building on trust, friendship and respect. Such relationships will prevent us from merely putting one stone on top of another or just earning a shilling a day, and enable us to help the Spirit build well the liturgical life in our parishes and dioceses. End of parenthesis.

In *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (PDV), Pope John Paul II said that the "ministry of priests is above all communion and a responsible and necessary cooperation with the bishop's ministry, in concern for the universal Church and for the individual particular churches, for whose service they form with the bishop a single presbyterate" (no. 17). Such a communion and cooperation amid the ordinary, daily circumstances of parish and diocesan life, demand of both priests and bishops the virtue of obedience.

Moreover, obedience is a vexed concept in our time. Pope John Paul II recognized all that, and addressed the issue squarely: "This 'submission' to those invested with ecclesial authority is in no way a kind of humiliation." He continued: "Authentic Christian obedience, when it is properly motivated and lived without servility, helps the priest to exercise in accordance with the Gospel entrusted to him for his work with the People of God: an authority free from authoritarianism or demagoguery."

In this connection, we commonly experience that a man who is obedient himself is better able in turn to elicit obedience from others. Pope John Paul remarked this as a phenomenon within the Church as well: "Only the person who knows how to obey in Christ is really able to require obedience from others in accordance with the Gospel" (PDV, no. 28).

The Holy Father by no means considered priestly obedience a simple or easy matter. We can think of so many situations, including the implementation of the *Missal*, in which these words from *Pastores Dabo Vobis* ring true: "This aspect of the priest's obedience demands a marked spirit of asceticism, both in the sense of a tendency not to become too bound up in one's own preferences and points of view, and in the sense of giving brother priests the opportunity to make good use

of their talents and abilities, setting aside all forms of jealousy, envy and rivalry" (no. 28).

Obedience also challenges us as bishops, and our call to humility, docility and fidelity in our apostolic endeavors constantly draws us to prayerful discernment and generous response. In *Called to Communion*, Cardinal Ratzinger reflected on the call to obey Christ that the Apostle Peter and his successors have received. The future Pope Benedict XVI reflected upon the Gospel passage in Matthew, chapter 16, in which Peter is called to be the rock on which the Church is founded, then after rejecting the Lord's prediction of his Passion, is rebuked for "thinking not as God does but as human beings do." This is Cardinal Ratzinger's reflection:

Left to his own resources, the one who by God's grace is permitted to be the bedrock is a stone on the path that makes the foot stumble. The tension between the gift coming from the Lord and man's own capacity is rousing portrayed in this scene, which in some sense anticipates the entire drama of papal history. In this history we repeatedly encounter two situations. On the one hand, the papacy remains the foundation of the Church in virtue of a power that does not derive from herself. At the same time, individual popes have again and again become a scandal because of what they themselves are as men, because they want to precede, not follow, Christ, because they believe they must determine by their own logic the path that only Christ himself can decide: "You do not think God's thoughts, but man's" (Mt 16:23).

As he continued his reflection on the Petrine ministry through the centuries, Cardinal Ratzinger developed this contrast between the weak, sinful nature of the human minister and the enduring, prevailing power of grace, in a way that is both sobering and encouraging for priests and bishops as well (more so in this present season of darkness and doubt than in some previous times):

The men in question [the popes] are so glaringly, so blatantly unequal to this function that the very empowerment of man to be the rock makes evident how little it is they who sustain the Church but God alone who does so, who does so more in spite of men than through them. For with the same realism with which we declare today the sins of the popes and their disproportion to the magnitude of their commission, we must also acknowledge that Peter has repeatedly stood as a rock against ideologies, against the dissolution of the word into the plausibilities of a given time, against subjection to the powers of this world.

We have said here this week that we bishops want to be father, brother and friend to our priests; that we seek the renewal of our own spiritual lives and that of our priests; that together with our priests we are committed to fostering unity among and with our priests. This morning we recognize that our ecclesial communion with our priests flows from our shared ministry of Word and Sacrament, especially from the Eucharistic liturgy, and we wish to deepen and strengthen that unity.

Still, we bishops will be working with our priests toward these goals of *communio* in a particular place and at a particular time, so we need to read the signs of our times in order to correctly size up the task before us, as well as the resources at hand and the obstacles along the way. We should begin positively: as we have heard before, 90% of Catholics think their parish priests do a good job, and more than 90% of our priests say that they are happy in their vocations and would choose priesthood again. Among our priests in this country, 97% like presiding at Eucharist, 89% enjoy preaching, and 74-79% enjoy working with people and being part of their lives. Speaking just statistically, even the numbers involved reflect the significance of the work that priests do: on any given Sunday across the United States more people are listening to a priest or minister than attend all the major sporting events in a year. How many people influence 1000 other people with their words every week?

Of course that's not nearly the entire picture, though it is a part of it. Among the 91% who say they are happy as priests, only 38% think other priests are content. According to one poll of priests taken after the Dallas Charter, 58% of priests said they believed that, if they had been accused, they would not have been dealt with fairly; only 27% said they believed they would have been treated fairly.

The experiences of these last eight years since Dallas have driven home to us bishops how fragile morale, trust and confidence can be within our presbyterates, and news coverage in these recent months has worsened that condition even more. In such circumstances, unity and mutual support among priests and bishops become even more important.

This week we have been discussing some factors that weaken or challenge unity within a presbyterate. Certainly great diversity in ethnic background, language and culture is one such factor, as are theological diversity (especially in ecclesiology), generational diversity, and diversity of perceived power (perceiving oneself as "in" or "out" in terms of the local church). If we priests and bishops are to be ministers, instruments and sacraments of *communio*, then a type of mortification is required. We need to "die" to certain

assumptions and ways of being; to ideological divisions; to generational conflicts; to clerical jealousy; to our own precious particular preferences and agenda. We will have to die to a spirit of partisanship because such a spirit is death to authentic presbyteral unity.

Still, we can be hopeful because we know that Jesus Christ the High Priest unites us bishops and priests in himself for the life and the service of the Church. Individualism and isolation in ministry weaken unity while fraternal cooperation and collaboration strengthen it. Because Eucharist is the very source of our presbyteral unity in Christ, this year and next year will present us with a number of opportunities for strengthening that unity. We all will be introducing the new *Roman Missal* to our priests, deacons, religious, lay ministers and lay faithful. If we can plan and carry out those introductory moments so that we move beyond providing merely information and training, and beyond wrestling with this particular response or that particular phrasing, we can engage in a catechesis that shows how Eucharist unites everyone at Mass in the church, all the parishes in the diocese, all the dioceses in the country, and all the local churches in the universal Church.

Our guide for introducing the new text of the Missal is Pope Benedict XVI himself. In the address that he gave to the members of the *Vox Clara* Committee on April 28 of this year, the Pope sensitively described the spirit with which we should introduce the texts, in these words:

A new task will then present itself... which in one way or another will involve all of you – the task of preparing for the reception of the new translation by clergy and lay faithful. Many will find it hard to adjust to unfamiliar texts after nearly forty years of continuous use of the previous translation. The change will need to be introduced with due sensitivity, and the opportunity for catechesis that it presents will need to be firmly grasped. I pray that in this way any risk of confusion or bewilderment will be averted, and the change will serve instead as a springboard for a renewal and a deepening of Eucharistic devotion all over the English-speaking world.

If we approach our task in the spirit described by our Holy Father, it is more likely that a deepened sense of *communio* in Word and Sacrament will unite not only priests and bishops in ordained ministry but all God's people in the Body of Christ. Then we will not be limiting ourselves to an ecclesial or liturgical equivalent of "putting one stone on top of another" or of "earning a shilling a day," but we will be helping the Holy Spirit nourish and build up the People of God, the Body of Christ.

June 2010 Meeting of the Committee on Divine Worship

The USCCB Committee on Divine Worship met in St. Petersburg, Florida on June 12-13, 2010. At the start of the meeting, Bishop Arthur Serratelli, Committee Chairman, welcomed Archbishop Gregory Aymond of New Orleans as the Chairman-Elect of the Committee. Bishop Serratelli updated the Committee on the status of the final text of the *Roman Missal, Third Edition*, which is still undergoing final editing by officials at the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. The staff of the Secretariat reported on catechetical efforts for the process of implementation of the *Missal*, particularly the workshops for priests being conducted around the country. To date, nearly 2,000 priests and diocesan leaders have participated in 10 workshops so far, with 12 additional workshops to be held later this year. Finally, a brief report on the question of the reception of Holy Communion from a percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy (“peg”) tube was shared with the Committee; the question is being researched further by the Committee on Doctrine. Several action items were considered by the Committee:

Questions about the Liturgical Calendar and Special Observances

A formal request to permit the celebration of the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe when it falls on a Sunday (as it does in 2010) was considered. The *General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar* (GNLYC) does not allow for this, noting that Sundays of Advent take priority over feasts of saints, including the Blessed Mother. The Committee determined that since even the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception is not observed on a Sunday in Advent, the GNLYC will remain in force. Also, a request to name St. Juan Diego as patron of Lay Apostles was considered. After a lengthy discussion, and since many lay apostolates already have their own patrons, the Committee declined to accept the request.

Revised Lectionary Readings for the Sundays of the Easter Season

Finally, the Committee continued its review of the Lectionary texts that has been underway for several years, focusing on the readings for the Sundays of the Season of Easter.

The Committee will meet again in Baltimore, Maryland on November 14.

Liturgical Calendar Advisory: Our Lady of Guadalupe

The date assigned in the liturgical calendar for the celebration of the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe is December 12. This year the feast falls on the Third Sunday in Advent. Because “Sunday must be ranked as the first holyday of all” (*General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar* [GNLYC], no. 4; see *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, art. 106), it gives way only to solemnities or feasts of the Lord. “The Sundays of the season of Advent, Lent, and Easter... take precedence over all solemnities and feast of the Lord” (GNLYC, no. 5). On Sunday, December 12, 2010, only the texts and readings of the Third Sunday of Advent (Year A) may be used.

While safeguarding an integral celebration of Sunday and the Season of Advent, the prescribed prayers and readings are echoed by Our Lady of Guadalupe in many ways. The prophet Isaiah preaches hope and consolation, prophesying the day of salvation for those in need. Jesus is the manifestation and fulfillment of this prophecy, which he points out to the disciples of John the Baptist. Our Lady of Guadalupe claimed justice for the people of Tepeyac, raising up those who were oppressed. On *Gaudete* Sunday, the Liturgy invites us to “[r]ejoice in the Lord always” (Entrance Antiphon). Our Blessed Lady fittingly shows how to rejoice in God our Savior, for her entire life was a hymn of praise.

While observing the Third Sunday of Advent, attention may be given to Our Lady of Guadalupe. The placement of her image in the liturgical space can call attention to this celebration. Intentions in the Prayer of the Faithful may appropriately include themes reflecting concern for unity in the Americas and may conclude with the collect customarily used for the Mass of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Processions in honor of Our Lady may take place as well. Many other local traditions, including the re-enactment of the story of the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe outside the liturgy may also enhance the celebration of the last week of the Advent season.

In those places where the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe has very special significance, the liturgical celebration may be transferred to Saturday, December 11 or Monday, December 13. This is in accord with the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* which states, “In cases of serious need or pastoral advantage, at the direction of the diocesan Bishop or with his permission, an appropriate Mass may be celebrated on any day except solemnities, the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and Easter, days within the Octave of Easter, the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls’ Day), Ash Wednesday, and Holy Week” (no. 374).