

The Paulus Institute

for the Propagation of Sacred Liturgy

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE PAULUS INSTITUTE

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Thank you, Your Excellency. It's good to have you here and thank you for your agreement to a short interview with a few questions. And the first one is, how can the faithful better appreciate that it is Christ acting in the liturgy and prepare to participate in his sacrifice?

BISHOP SCHNEIDER

I think the better way for the faithful to appreciate that it is Christ, the center of the liturgy, is the manner of the celebration itself. Firstly, the priest has to be, has to celebrate in a manner that shows that he is not the main person in the liturgy, but Christ is the main celebrant. The priest is only an instrument of Christ. And so the priest has to celebrate in a manner to be really not like a showman or to show his personal qualities, but to hide himself and to show Christ. So he has to hide himself and to show Christ in a manner of celebration.

The other concrete gesture is that the priest and the people face the same direction when they're doing the liturgy, to look upon the Cross together. And this is a very clear sign so that the people can be more conscious that in this moment we are celebrating really the sacrifice, sacramentally, the sacrifice of the Cross, and not only a meeting or gathering or a conference where we have to face one another.

And so these concrete gestures are very important which will help the faithful to participate in a deeper manner, more conscious that there is now the presence of the sacrifice of Christ and the Cross, in a sacramental manner.

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Then the orientation of the priest and the people is especially important?

BISHOP SCHNEIDER

Of course, and then as I said the manner in which the priest is celebrating. He has to avoid everything which can make him like a showman in a show. He has to be very careful not to add anything from himself, but in a certain manner to disappear in the rite himself, so that Christ may appear, like St. John the Baptist: I have to decrease and Christ has to grow; and in every step of the liturgy in every moment, the priest has to tell himself this.

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Thank you. We have copies of your book here today, *Dominus Est*. Can you tell us something about the book as kind of an introduction for people who have not read it, and how it can help us in preparing for Holy Mass?

BISHOP SCHNEIDER

Yes, the book is titled *Dominus Est*, it means “It is the Lord.” It is the verse from the Gospel of John. These are the words of the Apostle John when he saw our Lord, the Risen Lord, on the shore of the Sea of Gennesaret and the others were fishing but no one recognized the Lord. Only John. And then he exclaimed, “It is the Lord!” And then the others awakened. And so it was my intention to also shout in the Church that bishops and faithful please may awaken and recognize that in each of these little, little hosts during the distribution of Holy Communion, it is the Lord, the Creator of Heaven and Earth: the infinite majesty and sanctity of God hidden in this little host.

And unfortunately in the last 40 or 50 years, there has spread a manner to receive the distribution of Communion called “in the hand,” which really is a cause, an effective cause of the diminishing of the consciousness and the faith that It is the Lord. When I can handle the host as in a very similar manner as I can handle a chip and take with my two fingers and put it in my mouth, it is the same gesture as in Communion in the hand when the people take the host from the palm of their hand and themselves put It in the mouth. This is a typical ordinary gesture to take a meal, which you can observe in cafeterias and so on, in receptions. And this diminishes over time the consciousness that this little host is extraordinary and it is not a thing or even a holy thing, but Someone. This is our God.

And so I consider this a very serious problem. The greatest treasure which we have here on earth is our Lord, Eucharistic Lord, and in the host It is becoming so banalized, so exposed to ignorance. And the most grievous aspect in this manner is the loss of numerous fragments of the host, because they fall down continuously. It is true, no one can deny this effect; or they’ll stick on the palms or on the fingers and then they fall down on the floor and they are trampled. Our Lord is trampled by his faithful in numerous churches.

And we continue quietly and no one shouts and says stop, and everyone says okay, we can continue with this. It is incredible. It is a shame. We have to protest and to shout and this was the reason of my book. And I wrote a second

book, *Corpus Christi*, where I stressed more of this aspect, that our Lord in the Holy Host is the most defenseless, defenseless. There is no one in all the world today who is so defenseless as the Holy Host during distribution of Holy Communion.

And then the stealing of hosts. There is a business of stealing of hosts and this manner of Communion in the hand is facilitating enormously the stealing of hosts. And so it is horrible, and this is the most profound wound in the life of the church today. And when we do not take care and start to heal this wound, there will be no renewal of the Church, no, it can’t be, when the most holy, our Lord, is trampled and almost no one defends Him.

Well, defense, thanks be to God, our Lord is defended by the little ones, by the faithful who receive him devotedly, kneeling, even when they are humiliated by the priests, they kneel down. The clergy in majority humiliates those little ones who pay honor to their God in the little host. Children, young people, and old, but they are often humiliated during distribution of Holy Communion, because they are kneeling down. They are humiliated by the new Pharisees and Scribes, who occupy some ranks of clergy and high clergy also.

I remember in this situation often the words of Christ when he entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The children were throwing branches of palms to him and their cloaks for Christ the King. And the Pharisees, they were saying, Master, prohibit this. The Pharisees wanted to prohibit that the little ones pay honor to Christ. And the Lord answered them: When they will not shout, the stones will proclaim my honor and shout and cry. And so often it is for me, these words and this scene comes in my mind when people report to me that they were humiliated during distribution of Holy Communion because they were kneeling and honoring our Lord.

And so we have to really wake up and say why we are going to Mass, for whom, for which we have finality, to meet our Lord Christ, to meet him in his loving majesty, in all his love as Redeemer. We go to meet him, the Lamb of God with his wounds and who gives us his graces of redemp-

tion, we go to Mass to meet Christ first. Not to meet the priest. We go to meet Christ because I don't need the priest, I mean he is not the aim of the salvation of my soul, he also has his aim in Christ, all is Christ.

I have the impression that we lost very much the Christocentrism in liturgy, in our life, in our church life. And so, in exactly the manner of receiving Holy Communion, we go and then stop and then we have to kneel down, that is an intention, and then we recognize why I am kneeling down, because here is Someone who is greater than I, even this, the little host. And so I open my mouth like a little child to receive the Kingdom of God like a child. Even more than the Kingdom of God, the Lord of the Kingdom of God.

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Let me ask now what elements of the Extraordinary Form could be introduced now into the celebration of the Ordinary Form in order to help the focus on Christ and encourage reverence and recognition of His presence in the Eucharist?

BISHOP SCHNEIDER

Yes, we already spoke. I think the most basic element is the orientation, to be oriented in the same direction during prayer; the priest and the assembly are directed in the same direction, to the Crucifix on the altar. This is the first, I mean the first basic. And then, of course, Communion kneeling and on the tongue, but I have to add that Communion kneeling and on the tongue is not an element only of the Extraordinary Form. It is also the usual form in the Ordinary Form because Communion in the hand is an exception of the law, even in the new rite. Well, but so I repeat, the orientation, I mean to be turned towards the Lord.

And then we have another aspect of the Extraordinary Form which will help people and priests to experience more of the mystery of God. God is mystery. God is not an idea, a rationalistic idea. God is mystery and in front of the mystery one has to have silence, to have silence. So we have to introduce silence in the Mass. It will be good that the canon of the mass could be pronounced in a more silent way for the priest, for example.

And then, it would be also good that these comments and his own words which so many priests add during the Mass, should be abolished, because this changes completely the atmosphere. Because when there are moments when the priest can speak freely and add something, it changes the atmosphere. This becomes an atmosphere that is colloquial and informal and destroys, really destroys, the sense of mystery, of the supernatural, of God. Because in all these moments the priest puts himself in front, so they have to abolish this.

And then the other: the sanctuary has to be separated from the nave by the communion rail, to show that the altar is the sanctuary really. This is already an image of Heaven. We are going to Heaven. We are not yet in Heaven. We are going to Heaven. The nave is, nave means ship, a boat, from Latin. The church is a boat, we are on the trip, on the journey. But the altar, the tabernacle with the altar, is a symbol of the Heaven where we are going. And the priest is representing Christ; he is celebrating *in persona Christi Capitis*, in the Person of Christ, the head of the body. And therefore, in the sanctuary should be only those who in some manner participate in the priesthood, at least in some manner. Therefore, only men, not women, because women cannot receive the priesthood. The woman represents the totality of the faithful. And therefore it should be altar boys or men who serve even if they are not ordained, but because they are linked in some way to the priesthood because of the sex of the man.

And so this should be already another appreciation and another consciousness when we come in the church and there is a separate sanctuary. And then in the sanctuary it's all according to the hierarchy like in Heaven: priest, deacon, servants, representing the High Priest. All, even the little boys represent in some way the priest who is celebrating, of course in a nonsacramental way. And then of course the lecture and all the services should be made by men, servants in the sanctuary.

And then very important is the chant, the music. The music has to be not ordinary music but extraordinary, sacred, which lifts up our hearts to Heaven: the desire for the heavenly, to something not ordinary. And this is especially the Gregorian chant and really religious chant. There has to be avoided everything which could remind people dur-

ing Holy Mass of the ordinary, I mean the ordinary music which we hear in the street, of the guitar and so on. Because we are entering, when we're entering the Mass, into the Holy Land, as Moses, when he was in front of the fire on the mountain and God appeared to him in this bush fire and God said to him, Take off your shoes, kneel down, this is a Holy Land. The Holy Mass is even more Holy Land than those ancient times. And so we have the Holy Mass; the church is our Holy Land, it's already a piece of Heaven which we can experience. And so all has to contribute to this. So I have only mentioned some aspects, concrete aspects.

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Your Excellency, according to polls, many if not most Catholics, at least in the West, no longer recognize Christ in the Eucharist. Can you tell us how this problem should be addressed by the pastors of the church?

BISHOP SCHNEIDER

I think that the reason, the cause of this is a very deficient catechesis which the people received or have not received in their childhood and so on. Now after the Council already two generations, and when the majority have lost the true faith in the Eucharist this is for me evidence that they have not been taught in a sufficiently clear manner. As this is so, we have to start with the catechesis, a clear Eucharistic catechesis with the children, teenagers and even adults, with homilies in Sunday Masses, periodically about the truth, the integral truth of the Eucharist, to give some witnesses on Eucharist life, on Eucharistic miracles, and so on. So it depends on catechesis and homily and instruction first.

And then the second, from the liturgy itself: when we celebrate the liturgy like our meetings and can take Christ like in a reception buffet, so we are losing all the time the fullness of faith. And so we have to come back to our question in the beginning, we have to improve and really improve the liturgy, the manner to receive Holy Communion, and then also to guide the people to lead them to adoration, Eucharistic adoration.

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Then where would you place these activities in your priorities for the church?

BISHOP SCHNEIDER

Yes. The priority of the church is, I would say, as the Second Vatican Council said, that the summit of the church and the font and the source of all the life of the church is the Holy Liturgy, it means the Holy Mass, the Eucharist. So we have to start by this, as the Second Vatican Council said, this is the summit and the source of all activity of the church, the Holy Liturgy and especially the Holy Mass, the Eucharist. This is first. And then it's very necessary is to preach, to teach the Catholic faith, truly integrally. And then the families, the apostolate of families. It's so important to help the families to educate young people to found good Catholic families, large families. This is the first seminary. And then of course to renew the seminary, teaching and formation.

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And lastly, your colleague, Archbishop Jan Pawel Lenga who is the Bishop *Emeritus* of the Diocese of Karaganda in Kazakhstan, has just issued an open letter on the crisis in the church, <http://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2015/02/rorate-exclusive-open-letter-by.html#more>. He describes a loss of the faith among priests and bishops, even at high levels. How can the laity best respond to his warning?

BISHOP SCHNEIDER

First, the lay people have to renew, deepen their own faith. Be faithful to their faith, the faith of their Baptism. In Baptism, they have given promises, vows, not to the parish priest, not to our bishop, even not to the Pope, but to Christ. And so we have to be faithful to Christ first. Even be ready to give our life for Christ, for the integrity of the Catholic faith which we promise in Baptism, in Confirmation. And so, to deepen your own faith.

And then when the faithful observe that there is a lack of faith even in the hierarchy, in the clergy, they have to pray for them. Pray. And pray for their conversion and pray for new holy priests and bishops. Yes. And so it is a mystery

in the church because we are a body, a mystical body of Christ. In a body, when one member is suffering, the other is feeling the suffering, and so it can help the other. And so, I mean in this crisis God permits that the faithful, the simple ones, will strengthen the faith of those who should teach the faith, the clergy and the episcopacy.

This is a mystery, a permission which God permitted in our days. It is a really rare, extremely rare, phenomenon in the history of the church. But the victory of His Son, as is written in the Holy Scripture, our victory is our faith. Our victory will win the world. This is our Catholic faith. And so I am confident that even in this crisis in our days the church will be victorious, triumphant, because of the faith of the simple ones and of the decision of our Lady, who is the Mother of the Church, and her Immaculate Heart will triumph.

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Thank you, Your Excellency. I'm sure we'll want to read these words that you've had today in depth and think of them because of the grave circumstances that we're in today. Thank you for taking this time for us.

BISHOP SCHNEIDER

God bless you.