

*From Pontiff to Pew (continued):*

the liturgical books.

The aim that the Fathers had in mind is explained in no. 21 of the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: "In order that the Christian people may more certainly derive an abundance of graces from the sacred liturgy, holy Mother Church desires to undertake with great care a general restoration of the liturgy itself. For the liturgy is made up of immutable elements divinely instituted, and of elements subject to change. These not only may but ought to be changed with the passage of time if they have suffered from the intrusion of anything out of harmony with the inner nature of the liturgy or have become unsuited to it. In this restoration, both texts and rites should be drawn up so that they express more clearly the holy things which they signify; the Christian people, so far as possible, should be enabled to understand them with ease and to take part in them fully, actively, and as befits a community". The distinction, within the liturgy, between divine, immutable elements, and human elements, which instead "admit of various modifications, as the needs of the age, circumstance and the good of souls may require, and as the ecclesiastical hierarchy, under guidance of the Holy Spirit, may have authorized", dates back to Pope Pius XII's Encyclical *Mediator Dei* (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 39, 1947, 541-542).

Moreover, the desire for a "general reform" did not come about suddenly, but had been evident in the actions of successive Popes since the beginning of the twentieth century, in keeping with the demands of the Liturgical Movement. The assertion that the faithful should not attend celebrations "as strangers or silent spectators" had already been raised in Pope Pius XI's Apostolic Constitution *Divini Cultus*. Furthermore, one may recall Pius XII's interventions regarding the ordering of the rites of Holy Week, which he rescheduled to the hours corresponding to the events of Easter, after they had for centuries been brought forward to the morning hours. Nor should it be forgotten that Saint John XXIII regarded it necessary to simplify the rubrics of the Breviary and the Missal, approving this with the *Motu proprio Rubricarum instructum* of 25 July 1960, in which he referred the proposal of fundamental principles for a reform of the liturgy.

The liturgical reform promoted by the Second Vatican Council is thus firmly rooted in the living tradition of the Church. A correct understanding of it also enables us to reject the abuses that occurred in certain sectors of the Church during the post-Conciliar period, and which, unfortunately, still occur from time to time today, where some of the principles underlying the reform itself have been taken to extremes or misunderstood.

In this regard, it is worth recalling that the Conciliar Constitution affirms that "Liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations of the Church, which is the 'sacrament of unity', namely, the holy people united and ordered under their bishops. Therefore liturgical services pertain to the whole body of the Church; they manifest it and have effects upon it" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 26).

It is therefore the primary responsibility of pastors, of bishops but also of each individual priest, to safeguard and promote a liturgy which, while respecting liturgical norms, shines with noble simplicity (cf. no. 34) and thus manifests the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Such a liturgy will also be a fundamental vehicle for evangelization, the instrument of grace through which, as the Council teaches, we may learn to offer ourselves and, through Christ's mediation, be perfected in unity with God and amongst ourselves (cf. no. 48).