

PAIX LITURGIQUE

Letter 38 published 18 July 2013

ARCHBISHOP LUIGI NEGRI GIVES THE MOTU PROPRIO VIGOROUS AND DEEPLY PASTORAL PRAISE

Last May 19, Pentecost Sunday, a hundred Summorum Pontificum laymen from Emilia-Romagna (the region of Bologna) gathered at the feet of Our Lady of Poggetto, a shrine near Ferrare. This pilgrimage, which took place one year after the earthquake that shook the area, was principally meant to thank the Blessed Virgin for her protection: of all the churches in Ferrare, the little shrine chapel is actually the only one to have weathered the earthquake totally unscathed.

This event also provided an opportunity for the local groups of laymen attached to the extraordinary form to get to know each other better and to prepare for the next international pilgrimage of the Summorum Pontificum people in Rome. Providence gave these pilgrims a very pleasant surprise: although Archbishop Luigi Negri was originally only supposed to give them a brief greeting at the end of the morning, his timetable ultimately allowed him to arrive by the time of the sermon--which he agreed to give on the spot. Furthermore, as the celebrants (all diocesan clergy) and the faithful were hearing this homily and its emphatic praise of the Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum, they realized that they were witnessing a veritable event.

I - THE HOMILY OF ARCHBISHOP LUIGI NEGRI OF FERRARE DURING THE PILGRIMAGE AT THE SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF POGGETTO, PENTECOST SUNDAY 2013

Image

The Holy Mass according to the traditional rite is being celebrated today on the great solemnity of Pentecost, which always and everywhere reminds the Church, and therefore reminds every Christian, that the revelation of the Faith and its development in a life of community and communion, in the practice of charity, in an active exercise of mission, issue precisely from the miracle of the pouring out of the Holy Ghost into the hearts of the faithful--a pure gift of the Lord!

*The Holy Father Benedict XVI, in an admirable address during the meeting of the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization in which I had the honor of participating because he had invited me personally, said that the Church is not born of a decision taken at the grassroots, **the Church is not born of some constitutional assembly: the Church is born of the action of the Holy Ghost**, who changes men's hearts and identifies them to God's very Heart. It is the Spirit of the crucified and resurrected Lord, His outlook on life, his manner of apprehending existence, his relationship to men; it is the newness of His being and of His existence that was spent in --how shall I say?--an impetuous manner, within the life of an unquestionably prayerful community that awaited Him, but which could by no means claim to enter into the mystery of the event of which it was first a mere spectator, then a protagonist. The Spirit changes man's heart, his manner of being, his manner of acting, and his manner of apprehending existence. Christ's humanity extends throughout the world. The Church, born of the Spirit, maintains herself in the Spirit, and communicates herself to men through the Spirit. The Church is the face that Jesus definitively takes on in history.*

As for us, we have this other great inheritance, which is just as definitive: truly to participate in the mystery of the one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church. We truly live out this inheritance in our daily life, in happiness and in unhappiness, in health and in sickness, in joy as in sorrow, just as the actors of that great ecclesial sacrament, marriage, proclaim. I believe this sets this most praiseworthy pilgrimage, as well as this Mass, in its true context.

I hope, and I hope for you, that this Eucharistic celebration on the very day of Pentecost may help each of you, just as I hope it

helped me to rediscover the original ardor, the ardor of the birth of the Church begotten by the Holy Ghost. *The greatness surrounding the manifestation of our mission serves to make us a part of this newness and urges us not to keep it to ourselves but to spread it to all men.*

*Yesterday I participated in the Vigil of Pentecost that Pope Francis shared with over 150,000 young people from different Church groups. At one moment, the Pope said in his sincere and forthright style--which sometimes goes as far as a bluntness we are no longer used to--: "The Church needs to get out of herself," she must not close herself off. "When the Church closes herself off, she gets ill." **The Church must open herself up, not by abandoning her identity but rather by living out her identity, because the Church's natural environment is the mission. It is therefore fitting for the Church to come out of herself to go towards men, while exploring all the margins of contemporary human life.***

Pentecost, then, assigns the Church mission to you. She confers upon you the signal honor of being witnesses to the Risen Christ to the ends of the world. She makes of you begetters of sons of God, as Saint Irenaeus says in a wonderful text. She makes you capable of turning men into children of God.

During these first months of episcopal service [Archbishop Negri, formerly bishop of San Marino, was named Archbishop of Ferrare during the last days of Benedict XVI's pontificate] it has happened that I had to define the terms of life and mission. In this my greeting address I cannot, nor must I, go over every detail, but I think it important to place this celebration under the tender and firm gaze of Mary, and to consider it a moment of grace and responsibility.

Christianity is a grace-filled event because it is entirely a gift to us and no one can say "I have a right." *We had no right to the Faith. We had no right to the Incarnation of the Son of God. And so occasionally we've had to remind certain of the faithful who come with a request, or even a demand, for the sacraments that they have no claim to them. The sacraments are a gift of God that the Church has received from the Lord Jesus Christ and that the Church confers to those in a condition to receive them properly. I mean to speak of the absolutely groundless--from a theological and pastoral point of view--issue of the alleged "right" of divorced and remarried persons to receive the Eucharist.*

Now you are living this grace of the Church at the source of the Faith, that is, the Eucharist, the liturgical celebration. Thanks to Benedict XVI's prudent and great mercy, you draw it from one of the two great treasures of the Church's liturgy: the traditional liturgy. It is not an alternative to the liturgy reformed by the Vatican II council, but it expresses all of its character side by side with the reformed liturgy, in all dignity, in all freedom, and in all responsibility.

Benedict XVI expressed it with admirable clarity in the Motu Proprio. He wished to increase the possibility of living out the riches of the Church's liturgy and for this end asked all the Church, starting with the bishops, to show respect for his intention of increasing the Church's by favoring access to this ancient good for those who legitimately feel a desire for it and wish to live it out fully for the truth of the Faith and of today's mission.

The Pope has, beyond all question, gone beyond the false and unacceptable opposition between the old and the new; he has made a break with that hermeneutic of discontinuity between what existed before the Council and what the Council called for, and what the implementation of the Council has painfully produced for our time. There is only one Church of the Lord and the Spirit has granted it different moments to live through: the second Vatican council was an extraordinarily important moment, even though it presented a great challenge for the development of the Church.

And so you are using this liturgy, and I am glad that you are doing so in this diocese where I have only recently been archbishop. You are not doing this against anyone or to express opinions, but to live out the mystery of the Church according to the depth and truth you know you have the duty and right to practice. And the Church allows this too. *Benedict XVI--and I'm not one to use empty words--showed a real pastoral mercy when he put this possibility in the service of the Faith of every Christian and of small groups that need not even be numerically quantified: stable groups are made up of all the faithful who have the right and duty to benefit from this liturgy. It is within your reach and the Church allows you to practice it in full freedom.*

No one, no diocese of Italy or the world, will ever be able to say "no" to you. Should there be a single "no," you must then speak to the bishop. Before that, the dialog between the faithful who want the traditional liturgy and the Church is a dialog between you and the priest who is ready to help you in this ancient and very beautiful practice. *Of course all of this requires an appropriate preparation, but I am sure that you have it. I think that for this to become an experience that is accessible to all those who do not know it, there will have to be a time of formation and preparation.*

[Archbishop Negri then recalled his experience in his former diocese of San Marino; see our French letter 297].

Do as those who attend the reformed liturgy do: practice the ancient liturgy for yourselves. For the truth of your Faith. For the truth of your Charity. To give an impulse to your mission. These are two treasures for the same people. And this one, mature people nourishes itself from the Faith precisely if it knows how to live out the freedom that the Church grants it. Yet the

Church doesn't just grant this liturgical freedom--she also guarantees it.

Don't have opinions to defend or to oppose to others. The Archbishop of Ferrare and Comacchio is neither the guardian nor the propagator of any opinion whatever. He has but one opinion: the truth of the Lord, the Gospel, the Church's Tradition, the Holy Father's magisterium and, in union with him, his own magisterium.

This is the context in which Benedict XVI promulgated the Motu Proprio. I belong to those bishops, and truth be told there aren't that many of us, who have derived from it a deepening of their own identity with regards to their experience of God. It is a greatness not only for those who practice it but also for the entire Church.

For this reason, and in conclusion, you must always seek a greater participation in the life of the ecclesial community. This practice does not take you away from the life of the community and less yet from the difficult but beautiful realization of ecclesial communion.

In our region [which had been struck by an earthquake], ecclesial life is always strongly committed to the slow but relentless enterprise of emerging from material ruins which, as I have written, are like a challenge to incite us to rediscover Faith and Charity. I arrived among the clergy of this diocese and saw so many of the faithful shattered by last year's quake, which rendered hundreds of churches unusable. This compelled them, and compels us still, to live the Eucharist in makeshift venues, in halls where the communities are housed and in the few places spared by the quake. The earthquake destroyed houses and churches, but it did not destroy the Faith. On this Faith, we are basing our recovery. Unfortunately we also have to count on institutions which, until now, haven't shown much diligence.

Our foremost resource is our experience of the Faith. We are all members of the same one Church and, for this reason, you must, including through this beautiful and particular experience [of the traditional liturgy], seek to live more every day as living members of the Church who participate in the one Blood and Body of Christ so that Faith, Hope, and Charity may grow within you.

I am affectionately with you, I encourage you on your journey. I ask of you that healthy humility that Pope Francis, even before asking it from the Church, shows every day by his simple presence and manner. Have no concern but to live intensely what the Church has granted for your good and the good of all the Church. Be assured that you will always have my ear and my support. And, if necessary, my paternal correction, just as is the case for all communities as soon as this duty of mine should need to be exercised, but I doubt that will ever come to pass! *Continue this Holy Mass that I didn't want to interrupt. I mean to say that I could not participate in this praiseworthy initiative completely only because diocesan obligations connected with the Feast we are celebrating today awaited me, and still do.*

Now, for your journey to be sure and clear, embrace the truth, the gift of the Lord that the Holy Ghost has given to the whole Church and which the bishop conserves, protects, and communicates. Pray for me, for this far from light responsibility that I bear and accepted in the twilight of my life out of obedience to the Vicar of Christ who asked me to take it with an insistence that forbid any form of resistance. Happy feast day to all!

II - THE REFLEXIONS OF PAIX LITURGIQUE

1) Note that when the Archbishop said these words he was just back from Rome: meeting the Pope in no way cooled his enthusiasm or bridled his tongue. After the good news of the Summorum Pontificum pilgrimage next October and the article in *Il Foglio* about the Pope answering the bishops of Apulia that Summorum Pontificum was not to be removed nor limited (if you read French, see [here](#)), this homily contributed to the serenity we feel regarding the prospects of the extraordinary form of the Roman rite.

2) The clear and precise reminder of the spirit and letter of the Motu Proprio by a bishop is rare enough to warrant attention:

a) The stable groups of the faithful who desire to live their faith in the context of the extraordinary liturgy need not meet any particular condition: "Benedict XVI--and I'm not one to use empty words--showed a real pastoral mercy when he put this possibility in the service of the Faith of every Christian and of small groups that need not even be numerically quantified: stable groups are made up of all the faithful who have the right and duty to benefit from this liturgy. It is within your reach and the Church allows you to practice it with full freedom."

b) The pastor, and not the bishop, is the one who must be contacted. If the pastor refuses, which should not happen, only then must the requestors turn to the bishop: "No one, no diocese of Italy or the world, will ever be able to say no to you. Should there be a single "no," you must then speak to the bishop. Before that, the dialog between the faithful who want the traditional liturgy and the Church is a dialog between you and the priest who is ready to help you in this ancient and very beautiful practice."

c) This way of celebrating is integrated into the Church's normal life and mission: "Just as those who attend the reformed liturgy do, practice the ancient liturgy for yourselves. For the truth of your Faith. For the truth of your Charity. To give an impulse to your mission. These are two treasures for the same people. And this one, mature people nourishes itself from the Faith precisely if it knows how to live out the freedom that the Church grants it. Yet the Church doesn't just grant this liturgical freedom--she also guarantees it."

3) Like many priests who, thanks to the Motu Proprio, have been able to celebrate the traditional Mass, the Archbishop of Ferrare shares the personal enrichment it has given him: "I belong to those bishops, and truth be told there aren't that many of us, who have derived from it a deepening of their own identity with regards to their experience of God. It is a greatness not only for those who practice it but also for the entire Church."

We shall remember with emotion the following words one would like to hear often from the pastors of the Church: " I am affectionately with you, I encourage you on your journey . . . Be assured that you have my ear and my support."

We enthusiastically answer: "Ad multos annos, Excellency!"