

PAIX LITURGIQUE

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SUMMORUM PONTIFICUM, A SPIRITUAL OASIS FOR TODAY'S PRIESTS

“We must have the courage to create islands, oases, and then great stretches of land of Catholic culture where the Creator’s design is lived out.” Benedict XVI, April 6, 2006.

Canon law specifies that every priest, whether secular or regular, is to go on a spiritual retreat every year (canons 276 and 719). Dioceses and institutes provide yearly exercises for their priests, but the choice of a retreat is up to the individual, at least as far as concerns the secular clergy. These retreats often allow “ordinary” priests to live a few days with the traditional liturgy and spirituality; specifically, as is the case in France, in the discreet silence of the monasteries.

In many countries, however, there are no such monastic oases and priests who are attached, or simply attracted, to the extraordinary form of the Roman rite must either turn to Ecclesia Dei institutes or the Society of Saint Pius X, or organize themselves. This is the case in Italy where, under the lead of Fr. Nuara, OP, the Priestly Association Summorum Pontificum (“Amicizia Sacerdotale Summorum Pontificum,” or ASSP) has been giving such an opportunity to priests who sometimes have never before experienced Tradition.

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I - THREE QUESTIONS FOR FR. NUARA

The following answers were given in Rome at the end of the 2017 ASSP spiritual exercises (February 2017).

1) *Fr. Nuara, what are these spiritual retreat days like?*

Fr. Nuara: Very traditional, I should say! We’re now up to our seventh edition. Every year we invite a different preacher to present a theme of his choice bearing on some aspect of priestly and spiritual life. This year the *Amicizia Sacerdotale Summorum Pontificum* is pleased to welcome the founder of the Norcia Benedictines, Reverend Father Cassian Folsom, OSB, to teach us about the holy liturgy as a source of sanctification. The preacher gives two instructions every day, after Terce and None. Indeed our days follow the rhythm of common recitation of the Divine Office, from Lauds to Compline. As for the rest, silence prevails. Otherwise, the priests alternate throughout the day at the four altars provided for the celebration of private Mass.

2) *Who participates in your retreats?*

Fr. Nuara: All priests are welcome, whether or not they are diocesan priests, whether or not they celebrate in the extraordinary form of the Roman Rite, whether they come from Italy or abroad (this year, for example, we had a Polish missionary from Asia!). They often come two by two, one of them bringing the other along. Of course, even when they are unfamiliar with the extraordinary form, all are attracted to traditional spirituality. For some, it is an opportunity to renew their priestly identity, their vocation. Some of them have acknowledged that they had been backsliding in their practice of spiritual retreats as they were tired of the noisiness and superficiality of the retreats they attended. The silence they discover here with us, even though it is sometimes difficult to observe fully, is a treasure they lay up for themselves.

3) *Beyond the individual fruits inherent to such a retreat, do you see any collective fruits?*

Fr. Nuara: In the first place I'd like to say that this yearly retreat was itself born as a fruit of Benedict XVI's *motu proprio*. Secondly, after seven editions, it is evident that the fruits of this week of intense spiritual and liturgical life go beyond the individual. As the participants say themselves, it is all at once an experience of priestly charity, fraternal charity, and spiritual charity.

- **It is an experience of priestly charity** because it provides a primordial need of the priestly life which at the same corresponds with a canonical duty for priests. Some priests suffer because they are unable to find the spiritual nourishment they need in the retreats that their dioceses or communities provide. It is this key moment in their spiritual life that we offer them, thanks to the *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum*.

- **It is an experience of fraternal charity** because it allows priests who are often isolated, particularly because of their traditional leanings, to meet as brothers. It's an opportunity for them to share an intense moment of prayer, thought, and meditation with what Cardinal Sarah has rightly called "the strength" of silence. For a few days, they no longer feel like strangers

- **Lastly, it is an experience of spiritual charity** because it allows them to rest, heal, and strengthen their soul. It is an opportunity for all to revive the gift of God, the sacramental grace received at their ordination. In this way they stock up on apostolic zeal and are therefore better able to serve the souls entrusted to them once they are back at their parish or office.

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Many priests take advantage of their time of spiritual retreat to discover the extraordinary form of the Roman rite.

II - THE REFLEXIONS OF PAIX LITURGIQUE

1) Renewing one's priestly identity, reviving the sacramental grace received at ordination, stocking up on silence: **the reasons that draw priests to Fr. Nuara's retreats are also those that motivate many of the faithful, often those who have ceased the practice of the faith, to embrace the extraordinary form of the Roman rite.** For us laymen the silence of the holy mysteries as they have been celebrated by the Church for centuries helps to rediscover the meaning of our faith, to renew our baptismal promises, or to use an image, to slough off the old man better to put on Christ. Of course this quest for transcendence, for spiritual nourishment, stands out in a society—even a Catholic society—that is ever more horizontal, materialist, and instantaneous. Hence the need for the possibility of spending some time to recharge our soul: pilgrimages, spiritual exercises, private or public devotions which, in fact, abound among the entire *Summorum Pontificum* people.

2) As for priests, they are bound to pursue holiness, "because they are consecrated to God by a new title through the reception of orders, and are stewards of the mysteries of God in the service of His people," says canon 276. They, more even than the faithful, are bound to undertake regular "exercises" allowing them better to examine their conscience, to take stock of their priestly life before God, to revive their prayer life, and to fortify themselves in ascetic discipline and the life of the virtues. They doubtless can do this in different places and through different retreats proposed to them, but **the traditional liturgy is, as experience teaches, particularly suited to this revitalization of their existence.**

3) **The traditional liturgy, besides the spiritual and doctrinal qualities it has *ad extra*, i.e. for the faithful, also has a powerful ascetical and mystical "nutritional value" for the priests who celebrate it.** This appeal to the holiness and to the piety of the minister who is offering the holy mysteries is strongly embedded in the *usus antiquior* through the many prayers framing the high points of the sacrifice (ministers' preparatory prayers, prayers applying the sacrifice to the offertory, prayers to prepare for communion, and prayers of thanksgiving). In fact, the principal reformer of the liturgy himself, Abp. Annibale Bugnini, admitted that when the embryonic new Mass was presented to bishops for the first time—during the Synod of bishops assembly of 1967—they had a very negative impression of it, specifically because many of them found it "impoverished."* This was precisely because of the suppression of this whole magnificent corpus of prayers.

4) Lastly, in the backdrop of Fr. Nuara's work and other similar enterprises—think for example of the *Opus Sacerdotale* (France) or the *Netzwerk Katholischer Priester* (Germany) and the **Confraternity of Catholic Clergy** (USA, Australia, Ireland, UK)—is **the crucial theme of the necessary reform of the diocesan clergy.** Historically, the great renewals of the Church, such as the Gregorian Reform or the Counter-Reformation of the Council of Trent, have been structured by a demanding spiritual, ascetical, and doctrinal renewal of the clergy, particularly of the diocesan clergy, with the help of institutes that were founded to provide this help to the clergy "on the ground" or that reformed themselves in this direction (see the innumerable foundations of seminarians by the Eudists or the Vincentians in particular, but also the spiritual exercises organized for priests by the Society of Jesus). Nowadays, as the liberal crisis born of the Second Vatican Council continues to ravage the Church, this virtuous schema has reappeared in the invitation to renewal issuing from the communities and institutes that follow the rhythm of the extraordinary form of the Roman rite.

* Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy* (1948-1975) (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 350.

