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EASTERTIDE II/PENTECOST/ORDINARY TIME II

— From the Director of the Archdiocesan Office of Worship & Spiritual Life —

A fresco in the Vatican depicting the Council of Nicaea 325

Celebrating the 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea

THIS year, the Church celebrates a momentous milestone in her long and sacred history: the 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, convened in the year 325 A.D. by Emperor Constantine in the city of Nicaea. While it may sound like a footnote in a dusty history book, the decisions made at Nicaea continue to shape what we pray, what we believe, and how we worship—especially in the liturgy.

When we stand each Sunday and profess the Nicene Creed, we are not simply reciting a summary of our beliefs. We are echoing the voice of the Church that gathered 1700 years ago to defend the heart of the Christian mystery: that Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man. The Council of Nicaea was convened to respond to the Arian heresy, which denied the full divinity of Jesus Christ, claiming instead that He was a created being, not co-eternal with the Father. The bishops at Nicaea, guided by the Holy Spirit, solemnly declared that the Son is "consubstantial with the Father"—homoousios, of the same substance.

This wasn't mere theological nuance but a defense of the Incarnation itself. If Christ is not truly God, He cannot save us. The Creed we profess today is a proclamation of who God is, and who we are in relation to Him. Nicaea was a watershed moment of clarity for the early Church, and its legacy lives on in every celebration of the Eucharist.

The Nicene Creed was not originally part of the Mass. It was gradually integrated into the Roman liturgy in the 6th and 11th centuries, and today, it holds a privileged place in the Liturgy of the Word. As the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM 67) explains, the Creed is "a response to the Word of God" and "a way for the people to give their assent to what they have heard." Every time we chant or recite the Creed at Sunday Mass or solemnities, we are participating in the Church's act of faith that spans millennia.

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Moreover, the liturgy itself is deeply Nicene in spirit. The Eucharistic Prayer lifts us into the worship of the Trinity. The doxology ("Through Him, and with Him, and in Him…") affirms Christ's divine mediation. The Gloria—"You alone are the Holy One, You alone are the Lord"—echoes the anti-Arian conviction that salvation belongs to Christ as true God. Even the opening greeting "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ…" reflects the formula that Nicaea defended with such passion.

Again, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* referencing the Council of Nicaea in paragraph 465, teaches:

> *"The first ecumenical council of Nicaea in 325 confessed in its Creed that the Son of God is 'begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father'…"*

This affirmation forms the bedrock of Christian orthodoxy and continues to be reaffirmed in magisterial teaching through documents such as *Lumen Gentium* (1964) and *Dei Verbum* (1965), both of which ground the Church's self-understanding in the revealed identity of Christ.

Our late Holy Father, Pope Francis himself, in an address commemorating the anniversary of Nicaea earlier this year, urged the faithful to "return to the sources of our faith with gratitude and humility, drawing from them the strength to face the challenges of the present age."

In his seminal work *Introduction to Christianity* (1968), Joseph Ratzinger offers a profound reflection on the very nature of the Creed as both a theological articulation and an existential act. Ratzinger reminds us that to say "I believe" is not to assert an abstract principle but to entrust one's entire self to the mystery of the Triune God. The Creed, then, is not merely a doctrinal checklist but a liturgical and personal confession—a way of standing in truth before the living God.

Ratzinger emphasizes the continuity between the Creed and the Church's sacramental life: the Credo is born of the Church's lived encounter with Christ and is confirmed at the altar, where doctrine meets doxology. In this way, the Council of Nicaea's defense of Christ's divinity is not simply about orthodoxy but about communion—about the possibility of union with God through the Incarnate Word. He writes:

> *"The real God is not the God of abstract philosophical speculation, but the God who is present in the liturgy, who communicates himself in the Word and in the Sacrament."*

Thus, Nicaea's theological discussions were ultimately pastoral. They were about guarding the integrity of worship and ensuring that what is proclaimed in the Creed is truly encountered in the Eucharist.

As we mark this 1700th anniversary, the Church is invited to do more than remember a council. We are called to renew our gratitude for the faith we have received—a faith that has been fought for, prayed over, and handed down with reverence. Every time we profess the Creed, we affirm not only our belief in God but our belonging to His Church. And every time we approach the altar, we approach the mystery that Nicaea defended: that in Jesus Christ, God has come to save, not symbolically, but truly.

– Fr. Vigoa

Flags in the Sanctuary

As part of my doctoral dissertation, I've been reading a great deal of the writings of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, and I recently came across a curious detail from his pastoral ministry. During the difficult years of World War II, Bishop Sheen—then one of the most prominent American Catholic voices—encouraged the display of the American flag in Catholic churches as a sign of solidarity and remembrance for those serving in the armed forces. It was a deeply pastoral gesture, arising not from a liturgical mandate but from a desire to unite the nation in prayer during a time of war.

Reading this made me pause and reflect on the question of national flags in our sanctuaries today. What place—if any—should symbols of national identity hold in sacred worship spaces? The answer requires more than nostalgia or sentiment; it calls for a thoughtful return to liturgical theology, Church documents, and sound pastoral judgment.

The question of flags in Catholic sanctuaries is primarily a pastoral issue in the United States. While common in some parishes, their presence is not rooted in universal Church law and has been subject to various interpretations and practices over the years.

The U.S. Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy addressed this question directly in its 1978 document *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*. Paragraph 101 states:

> *"Although the art and decoration of the liturgical space will be that of the local culture, identifying symbols of particular cultures, groups, or nations are not appropriate as permanent parts of the liturgical environment. While such symbols might be used for a particular occasion or holiday, they should not regularly constitute a part of the environment of common prayer."*

The more recent replacement document, *Built of Living Stones* (2000), currently governing liturgical art and architecture in the U.S., does not mention flags. However, it consistently affirms the centrality of the altar, ambo, and chair in the sanctuary and warns against clutter or symbolic confusion. The absence of flags in these updated norms is telling—it suggests caution in conflating national identity with sacred space.

The sanctuary is not a civic space. It is the heart of divine worship where Christ is made present in the Eucharist and the people of God are gathered into His saving mysteries. The symbols that occupy this space must point directly to Christ and the paschal mystery—not to any earthly power or political reality.

Even the *Order of Christian Funerals* is clear: if a casket enters the church draped in a national flag, that flag is respectfully removed and replaced with a white pall—symbolizing the deceased's baptism and unity in Christ. The message is clear: in the Church, our truest identity is not national, but sacramental.

Additionally, the *United States Flag Code* (Section 175k) advises that flags in houses of worship should be displayed with respect and dignity, usually near the entrance or in gathering areas. According to tradition and custom, the place of honor for a flag is to the right of the speaker. In the sanctuary, that position belongs not to the flag—but to the altar, the ambo, and the sacramental symbols of Christ's presence.

Respect for the flag and respect for the sanctuary are not mutually exclusive. In fact, true patriotism calls us to preserve both. Here are some recommendations:

1. Display the flag in the narthex, parish hall, or outside on parish or school grounds - let it fly high and proud.
2. Use the flag contextually on civic holidays or special national events.
3. Offer catechesis. Teach parishioners that honoring the flag is not diminished by respecting the sacred space of the sanctuary. Instead, it reflects a deeper understanding of both our earthly citizenship and our heavenly calling.

As Archbishop Sheen reminded us, freedom and faith are not enemies—but neither are they identical. The Church offers the world something even greater than national unity: the mystery of salvation in Christ. -RJV

The Sacred Role of the Lector

In every celebration of the Mass, when the Scriptures are proclaimed, God Himself speaks to His people. This is not mere symbolism; it is the living conviction of the Church. As the General Instruction of the Roman Missal reminds us: *"When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his word, proclaims the Gospel"* (GIRM 29).

The role of the lector is a sacred and essential ministry within the liturgy. Though not ordained, the lector is entrusted with the public proclamation of the Word of God (except the Gospel), a task which calls for preparation, reverence, and a deep interior awareness of what is being proclaimed. The lector is not simply reading text aloud; they are lending their voice to God's living Word.

That is why preparation is so important. A lector must approach the Scriptures prayerfully, ideally beginning days in advance. They should meditate on the reading, ask what God is saying through the text, and practice the pronunciation, pacing, and tone so that the message comes across clearly and reverently.

At the ambo, the lector should pause briefly after announcing the reading and again after completing the text before proclaiming, "The Word of the Lord." This helps the assembly to receive the Word with stillness and attention. As Pope Benedict XVI noted in *Verbum Domini: "The Word of God should be read and received as something alive, not as a dead letter"* (n. 56).

Clarity, audibility, and a prayerful demeanor are vital. The lector should speak slowly, clearly, and confidently. Familiarity with the microphone and sound system is not a minor detail—it ensures the Word of God is truly heard by the people.

Because this role is central to the liturgy, it deserves regular training and spiritual renewal.

I invite all current lectors, as well as anyone interested in becoming a lector, to a Lector Workshop on Saturday, August 16th at 10:00 a.m. at St. Augustine Church. Whether your lectors have served for years or are just beginning, this workshop will provide formation, refresh their liturgical skills, and ground them in the responsibility of this ministry. -RJV

Choosing Music for the Mass

How do we choose the most appropriate music for Mass? It's a question every parish music coordinator, choir director, and pastor faces regularly. The Church, in her wisdom, offers a helpful framework: music for the liturgy should be selected with liturgical, musical, and pastoral appropriateness in mind (*cf.* GIRM 39–41).

First and foremost, music must serve the liturgy. That means asking: *What is the season or solemnity being celebrated? What is the Gospel of the day? What is the specific liturgical moment?* A Communion chant should differ in tone from a Gloria; an Entrance chant during Advent will differ from one at Easter. We're not simply selecting our favorite hymns—we're supporting the mystery being made present at that particular Mass.

The music itself must be well-crafted, singable, and reverent. It should elevate the liturgy, not distract from it. Not every style of music is equally suited to the Mass. There's a distinction between devotional songs, which may have great spiritual value, and music that is intentionally composed to support the liturgical action. Additionally, the role of the assembly must never be forgotten. Music should invite and enable full, conscious, and active participation—not merely showcase a soloist or ensemble.

We must also consider the community that gathers. Who are they? What language do they speak, musically and spiritually? Is the assembly young, elderly, diverse? While the Mass itself does not change, the pastoral application of music always involves thoughtful discernment. A parish with limited musical resources should never feel pressured to imitate our very talented cathedral choir. What matters is that what we do is done well, with reverence and clarity. Sometimes, less is more.

It can also be helpful when the pastor shares the theme of his homily in advance with the music director. While the homily should always be rooted in the readings, a well-chosen Communion or sending hymn that resonates with the preached message can offer the faithful a deeper moment of reflection—and reinforce the unity of Word, Sacrament, and lived discipleship.

It is also important to avoid abrupt shifts in tone. While there may be a blend of musical styles within a Mass, a certain unity of musical expression helps reinforce the unity of the liturgical action. The music should not feel like a patchwork, but like a single offering of praise, rising in harmony with the prayers of the Church.

At this point, I've invited Max, our archdiocesan director of music and a true master in this field, to offer his insights on selecting music for the liturgy. His experience in composing, arranging, and forming musicians across the archdiocese gives him a unique perspective. Max will offer practical examples and deeper reflections on how we can faithfully implement these principles in our parishes.

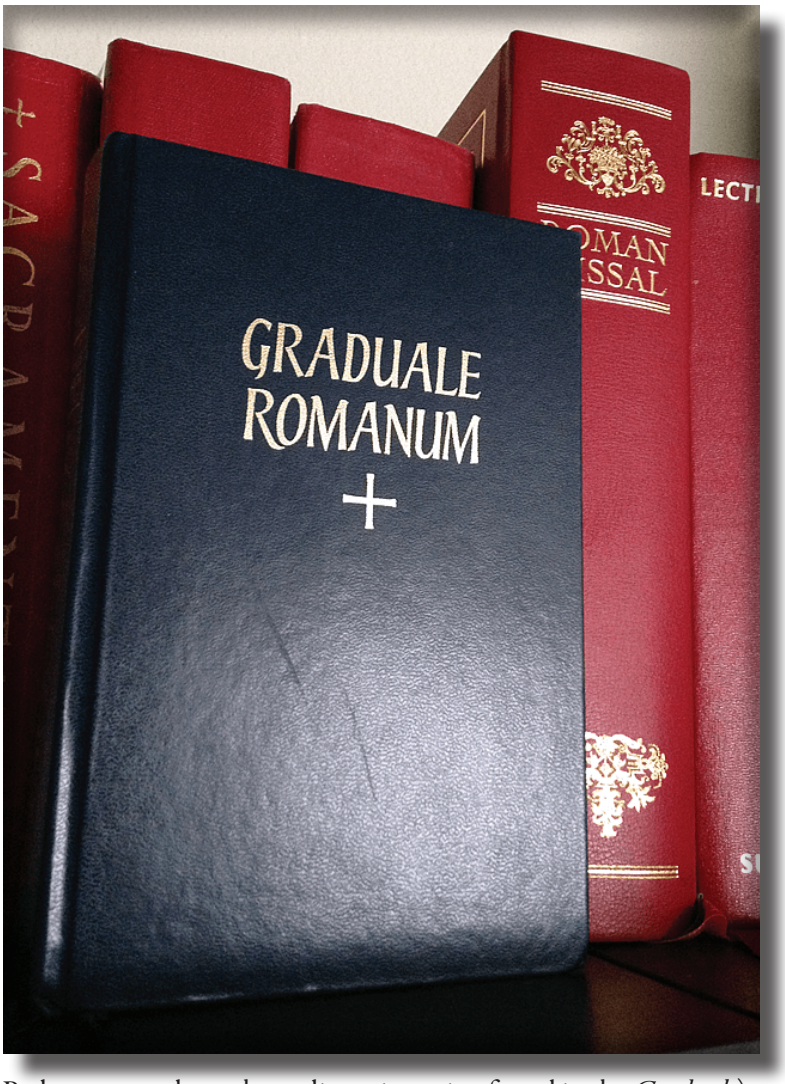
Thanks, Fr. Vigoa, for this opportunity to write about a very important subject for all of us who assist with the musical planning, preparation, and performance for the sacred liturgy. I've done this for a long time now, some 25 years, and I have been extremely fortunate to serve all over the country, and even in Rome, and also to serve a number of different types of worshiping communities. First, I'd like to invite anyone involved in leading the music in a parish of the archdicoese to join us for our **next meeting of the ADOM Parish Musicians' Network on Tuesday, June 17th, at Saint Gregory the Great Church in Plantation, beginning at 6:30PM**. For further information see the flier at the end of this newsletter. Whether you are a director, accompanist, cantor, or ensemble musician I hope that you'll make plans to join us!

I think the easiest way for me to talk about planning is for me to describe how I go about my own planning of the music for Masses here at the Cathedral, and elsewhere. I'm sure that I begin as many of you do with the questions:

- What is the Mass that is being celebrated *(Sunday, Feastday, Ritual Mass, Feria, Wedding, or Funeral)*?
- What time of day is the Mass being celebrated *(morning, afternoon, or evening)*?
- What are the musical resources available *(organ, piano, cantor, choir, other instruments)*?
- What language(s) will the Mass be celebrated in?
- Who is the priest celebrant?

Next, I will look at the texts of the Mass being offered:

- What are the Propers of the Mass being celebrated *(Entrance, Offertory, and Communion Antiphons)?*
- What are the lections of the Mass being celebrated *(First, Second Reading, Gospel)*?



Very often, and even MOST of the time, once I am able to answer these questions my music plan will begin to fall into place rather quickly. The first decision for me is usually the choice of the Mass Ordinary that is to be sung; that is the Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei. These texts are "Ordinary" becuase they are the unchanging texts of the Mass; they are "ordinary". So I will make a choice between Latin, English, or Spanish, and then chant, or metrical. Very soon we have a Mass coming up here at the Cathedral for the Cuban Association of the Knights of Malta. For this Mass we will do a mix of Latin and Spanish, and thus a mix of chant and metrical.

Next, for me, will be the decision of using the Proper texts, or those texts that may, legitimately so, replace the Proper texts of the Mass. The Propers are those texts that change with each Mass being celebrated (think *Christmas Eve Mass During the Night* as opposed to the *Mass of Easter Day*-the texts are obviously different, and thus "proper"). Many musicians do not know that the Church provides us all of the music to be sung at Mass. This music is contained in the offical book belonging to the musicians, the *Graduale Romanum.* This book was most recently revised in 1974, and thus contains everything that we need to sing the Mass! The *Graduale* contains the Entrance, Offertory, and Communion Antiphons, as well as the Gradual, and Alleluia, or Tract (for Lent). At the Cathedral Stational Mass on Sundays the Proper chants from the *Graduale* are always sung, most often in addition to a hymn, or a motet. At the Entrance we will sing a vernacular hymn, followed by the Entrnace Antiphon (Introitus). At the Offertory we will sing the Offertory Antiphon (usually to a Psalm tone, and not the melismatic setting found in the *Graduale*) and then a vernacular hymn, or even a choral anthem or motet. At Communion, we will sing the Communion Antiphon from the *Graduale,* the appointed verses in the vernacular, and then, after the choir has received Holy Communion, a vernacular hymn, or another choral anthem or motet. Very often the texts of the antiphons can directly inspire a choice of a hymn to be sung.

I would say that for the liturgical seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter this process works extraordinarily well. It really is during the long stretch of Ordinary Time in the Summer months, and into the Fall, that sometimes I have to really search for a theme in the Readings, or reliably fall back on those hymns that I know my assembly knows, loves, and sings heartily on almost any occasion.

There are, of course, a number of commercially available resources to assist you in your planning. I would caution you to use resources that are not publisher-driven. What I mean by this is an OCP planning aid will necessarily only present music published by OCP, and the same goes for GIA resources. One enormously helpful planning tool for me is the website canticanova.com. The suggestions are guided by the same methedology that we've discussed here already, namely the lections and the Propers. Another website I have found helpful is pewmissal.com and its planning guide. For Spanish, I use the same methodology, and rely heavily on the resources available to me including the parish hymnals, and the choices of other trusted musicians serving hispanic communities. At the Cathedral we regularly sing a Spanish setting of the Communion Antiphon, its accompanying verses, and then follow that with a vernacular hymn or song. At the Entrance we use a vernacular hymn or song, and then sing the Entrance Antiphon from the *Graduale*, in Latin. For Sundays outside of Advent, and Lent, we use the very familiar *Misa Meolodica* for the Mass Ordinary. This past Sunday we celebrated the Feast of the Ascension. At both the Entrance Procession of both the English and Spanish Masses we sang the hymn "Hail the Day that Sees Him Rise (LLANFAIR), followed by the antiphon *Viri Galilaei* from the *Graduale.* I present my own work not as the ideal, but merely one way of approaching the work that we do.

In the end, music is not just an "add-on" to the liturgy—it is integral to it. Good liturgical music does not entertain; it evangelizes. It helps people pray, encounter the mystery of Christ, and be drawn more deeply into the sacred action of the Mass. As with all things liturgical, choosing music must begin and end in prayer. - RJV/MCT

What Happens if a Host Falls During Communion?

It's a rare but important moment: during the distribution of Holy Communion, a host falls to the ground. What should be done? How do we respond with reverence, clarity, and fidelity to the Church's teaching?

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) addresses this directly in paragraph 280:

> *"If a host or any particle should fall, it is to be picked up reverently. If any of the Precious Blood is spilled, the area where the spill occurred should be washed with water, and this water should then be poured into the sacrarium in the sacristy."*

The first and most important point is that the host must never be left on the ground. It should be picked up immediately, with care and reverence—both to honor the Real Presence of Christ and to avoid the risk of it being trampled by others in line for Communion. There is no liturgical basis for delaying or hesitating in this action.

In most circumstances, the priest, deacon, or extraordinary minister should consume it reverently. This immediate act of reverent consumption reflects our belief in the Real Presence and avoids any confusion or distraction from the sacred moment. Additionally, a purificator and a small amount of water should be brought over to carefully wipe the area where the host fell, ensuring any potential fragments are reverently removed. Thankfully, the hosts commonly used in the United States generally do not leave fragments or broken pieces, significantly minimizing the likelihood of fragments.

However, if the host has fallen in such a way that it is clearly soiled or contaminated—for example, if it lands in dirt, mud, or falls out of a person's mouth, making it unfit for consumption—the Church does allow for a different approach. In such cases, the host should be placed in a vessel of water, allowing it to dissolve completely. Once dissolved, the water is then poured either directly into the earth or down the sacrarium—a special sink in the sacristy that leads directly to the ground, not the sewer.

It is never appropriate to pour this water down a regular sink or to discard the host in a way that would imply disrespect or profanation.

Theologians agree that the Real Presence of Christ ceases once the Eucharistic species is no longer present (that is, once the host is no longer truly "bread" in form), we still handle the sacred species with utmost reverence. Waiting for the host to dissolve fully is an act of devotion, not merely procedure—it safeguards our belief and prevents scandal or misunderstanding.

This process is not just a technical matter—it's a spiritual one. The way we treat the Eucharist, even in moments of mishap, reveals the depth of our faith. Whether as priests, deacons, extraordinary ministers, or faithful in the pews, we are all called to respond to these moments with both reverence and calm, allowing our actions to reflect what we believe: that Jesus Christ is truly present in the Blessed Sacrament, and He deserves nothing less than our full attention, respect, and love. -RJV

Why the Chasuble Still Matters

The other day at lunch—a time when, amusingly, much of my liturgical newsletter material seems to surface—I was talking with a few brother priests. One of them shared a photo from his home parish. It was a nice picture of his pastor with some people holding a reliquary containing a relic of St. Padre Pio. But what caught my eye wasn't the reliquary—it was the celebrant.

The pastor, presiding at the liturgy, was wearing only an alb and stole—no chasuble. And this wasn't a private Mass or some small chapel gathering. It was the parish's daily Mass, with large group of faithful in attendance, a vested altar, and all the signs of ordinary liturgical life. The priest, I was told, is known for regularly omitting the chasuble at weekday Masses.

That may not raise eyebrows for everyone, but it should at least give us pause. After all, this isn't about preference or style—it's about what the Church asks of us, and what the sacred liturgy deserves.

The Church addresses this directly in *Redemptionis Sacramentum,* a 2004 instruction from the Congregation for Divine Worship. It clearly states:

> *"The vestment proper to the priest celebrant at Mass is the chasuble, worn over the alb and stole. This applies to all Masses and sacred actions connected to Mass, unless the rubrics indicate otherwise."* (RS 123)

In short, the chasuble is not optional when a priest is presiding at Mass. It is the garment proper to the sacrificial offering, a sign of charity, and a visible expression of the priest's role in the liturgy. Omitting it—not out of necessity, but by habit or preference—is contrary to the liturgical norms.

The same instruction goes on to strongly discourage casualness in this matter:

> *"It is a serious abuse for sacred ministers to celebrate Holy Mass or other rites without the proper vestments, or to wear only a stole over ordinary clothing or a religious habit... Such practices are to be corrected by Ordinaries."* (RS 126)

Now, there are rare exceptions. For example, if a priest is concelebrating and there are not enough chasubles, he may wear only an alb and stole. But even then, the Church encourages advance preparation so that all may vest properly.

We wear the chasuble not for ourselves, but for Christ and His people. It is a visible sign that something sacred is happening—something greater than the personality or preferences of the celebrant. The Mass is not ours to redesign; it is Christ's sacrifice, entrusted to the Church.

So yes, a beautiful relic of Padre Pio can—and should—inspire devotion. But so should the care, reverence, and obedience we show in how we celebrate the Eucharist. And that includes wearing the chasuble. -RJV

Flowers on the Altar

DURING my time in Rome, I had the opportunity to visit many beautiful churches—some grand and historic, others small and tucked away. I've noticed that in several of these churches, it's not uncommon to see flowers placed directly on the mensa—the flat surface of the altar where the Eucharist is consecrated.

However, it's important to remember that this is not permitted in the United States. Even if it seems to be a custom elsewhere, placing flowers—or anything else that does not belong—on the mensa is contrary to liturgical norms in our country.

The Church is very clear about this in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM):

> *"Floral decoration should always be done with moderation and placed around the altar rather than on the altar table itself."* (GIRM 305)

This teaching is echoed in the U.S. bishops' guidelines, especially in *Built of Living Stones,* the foundational document for church art and environment in the United States. It states:

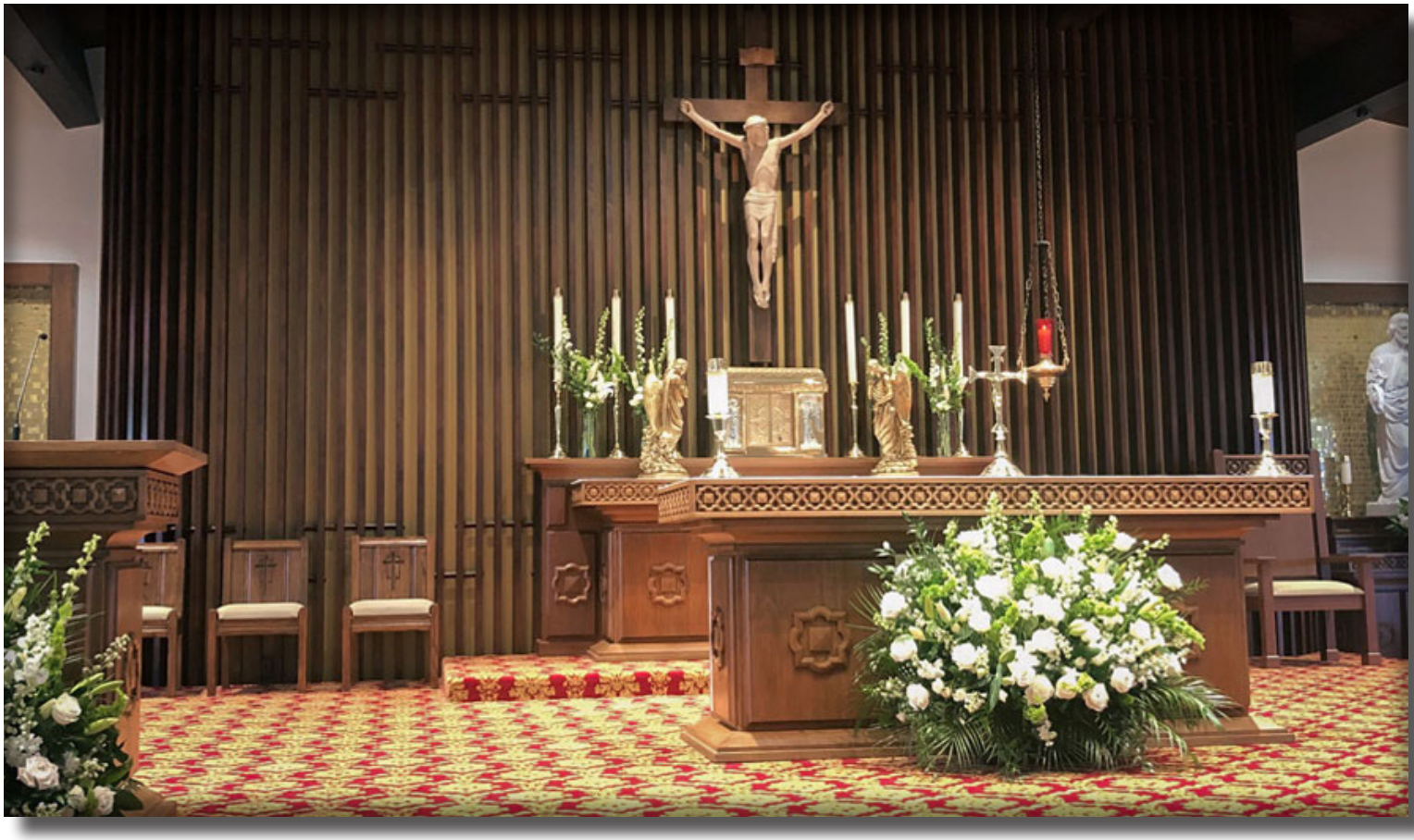
> *"Floral arrangements... should never obstruct the view of the altar or of the action taking place at it. Arrangements should not be placed on the altar table itself but rather in the space around it."* (BLS 129)

Why this caution? Because the altar is not just a table—it is a sacred place, representing Christ Himself and the sacrificial offering of the Mass. The mensa should be kept clear of all unnecessary objects so that the altar is never confused with a platform for decoration or display.

This doesn't mean flowers have no place in our liturgies—they do! When done with beauty and moderation, floral arrangements can help lift the heart to God. But they should be placed around the altar, never on it.

So whether it's flowers, candles other than the required altar candles, pictures, banners, or anything else that has no place on the mensa, the rule is simple: leave the mensa free and clear, reserved only for what is necessary for the celebration of the Eucharist—nothing more.

It's a small discipline, but it reflects a larger truth: how we treat the altar speaks volumes about what we believe is happening on it.
-RJV



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Update on the New Lectionary and the Liturgy of the Hours

Recently, a priest asked me about the status of the new Lectionary—specifically, when we might expect its publication. It's a good question. Here's a brief update that I hope will clarify things:

The USCCB has been steadily working on a revised version of the Lectionary. The aim is to provide a fresh, accurate, and spiritually enriching translation that aligns more closely with recent biblical scholarship and the Church's guidelines on liturgical translations outlined in *Liturgiam Authenticam.*

The primary scriptural source for the new Lectionary will be the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE). This translation is familiar to most Catholics in the United States. The revision process, however, is a meticulous one—each passage requires careful examination and approval by both the US bishops and, eventually, the Holy See.

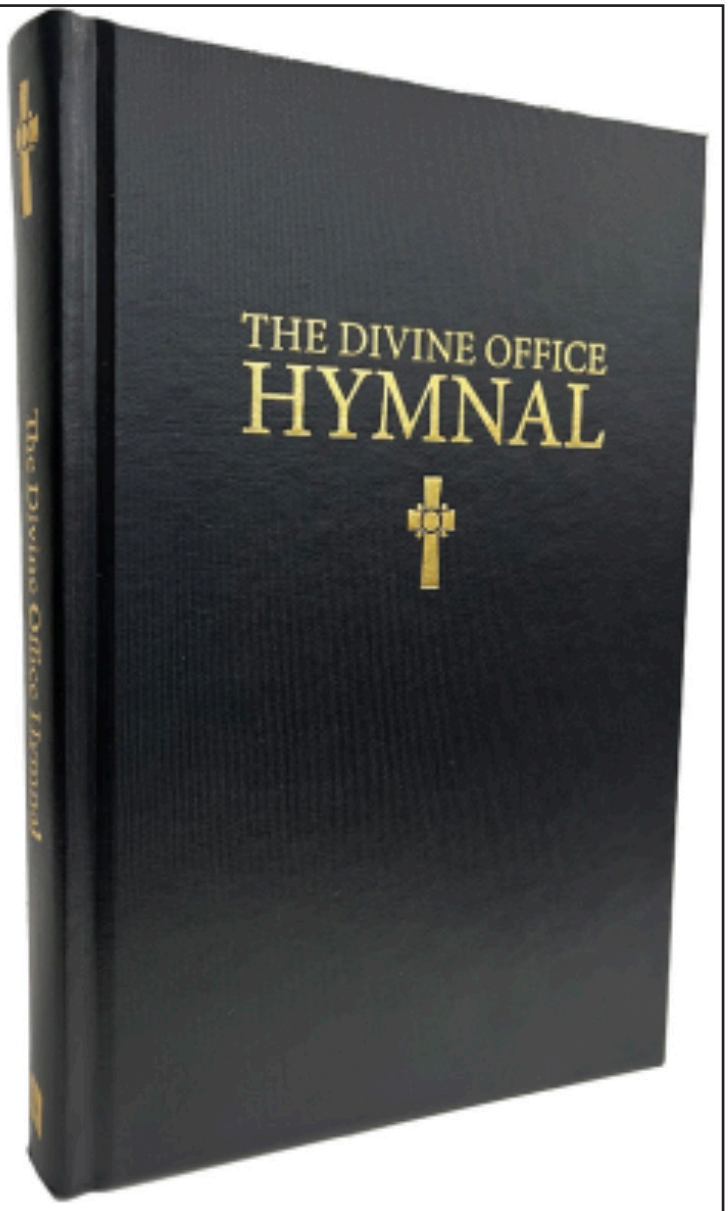
At the moment, they don't yet have an official release date, but we do know the project is nearing completion. The various parts of the Lectionary have been moving steadily through the review stages. Once fully approved, we can expect publication shortly thereafter. This is encouraging news.

Naturally, updating the Lectionary has implications for the Liturgy of the Hours (the Breviary). The Church seeks consistency between the various liturgical texts we use each day. Because of this, the USCCB is also in the process of revising the Breviary.

The updated Breviary will notably feature the Abbey Psalms and Canticles, a translation particularly suited for both communal recitation and singing. Additionally, the readings and prayers within the Breviary will reflect the NABRE translation, ensuring unity with the forthcoming Lectionary.

Moreover, something I recently learned is the inclusion of newly translated hymns from the Latin tradition, many of which have not previously been available in English. These translations, overseen by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL), promise to enrich our prayer life by providing fresh yet faithful renderings of beloved liturgical hymns.

I'll keep you updated as more concrete details emerge. -RJV



The Divine Office Hymnal

GIA is proud to partner with the USCCB to present The Divine Office Hymnal, prepared in anticipation of the Liturgy of the Hours, Second Edition.

Sixty years ago, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council expressed an earnest desire that the entire Church—not only the clergy—join in offering praise to God in the Divine Office. The Council encouraged prayer in common whenever possible, prayer that is expressed with music, and prayer that is carried out with understanding as well as devotion. It is the fervent hope of the USCCB that The Divine Office Hymnal will contribute to a renewal in this most beautiful and powerful prayer of the Church.

In preparation of this hymnal, the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) spent several years translating the nearly 300 Latin hymns of the Divine Office. These translations were approved by the USCCB in 2019. In addition, ICEL proposed melodies suited to each text including the Gregorian chant melodies of the Liber hymnarius as well as public domain tunes. The hymnal makes use of these suggestions by presenting both metrical and plainsong settings for each hymn.

Crucified Christ in the Sanctuary

One of my great privileges in ministry is serving on our diocesan building committee, particularly when a parish undertakes a renovation, redesign, or construction of a new sacred space. This role involves collaborating closely with pastors, the building office (David Prada), and parish communities, helping to ensure our church buildings reflect the theology and spirituality at the heart of our Catholic faith. It is also my responsibility to ensure that these efforts align with the vision and directives of our Archbishop, who, as the chief liturgist of our archdiocese, guides us in maintaining liturgical integrity and fidelity to Church teaching.

Recently, a topic that's come up regularly is the placement and depiction of Christ in the sanctuary, specifically whether the main focal point should be a crucified or risen Christ. The archbishop has consistently recommended—and indeed strongly advocated—for a crucified Christ rather than a risen Christ in the sanctuary. While we recognize that many parishes currently have a risen Christ in their sanctuaries, perhaps in the future, if a renovation or even a small facelift is being considered, this might be an appropriate time to transition to a crucified Christ.

This recommendation is not a matter of personal preference but is deeply rooted in Catholic liturgical theology and tradition. According to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM, no. 308), the cross displayed near the altar "should clearly depict Christ crucified." The Church's liturgical guidelines emphasize the Crucifix as a central element of Catholic worship because it visibly communicates the Paschal Mystery—the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It is precisely through the cross, through Christ's sacrificial love and suffering, that the fullness of salvation and resurrection becomes meaningful and impactful for us.

A risen Christ image is beautiful and appropriate in other contexts—perhaps in the parish hall, in the office or in spaces dedicated to meditation and reflection. However, in the sanctuary, especially directly behind or near the altar, the Church instructs that we clearly present Christ crucified. This image powerfully and vividly reminds us that the Eucharist we celebrate is intimately connected to the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary.

Theologically, the Crucifix serves as a profound catechetical tool. It is a visible sermon, teaching each generation of Catholics about the depth of God's love revealed most fully in Christ's self-giving death. While we celebrate the resurrection joyfully in every Mass, the sacrifice of Christ remains central and foundational. Pope Benedict XVI beautifully articulated this connection: "The Cross is the sign par excellence of love and hope."

In our pastoral practice, adhering to this guidance helps us preserve and pass down a clear, unambiguous understanding of the Eucharistic celebration as sacrifice. It's a reminder of the price of our salvation and the depth of God's mercy. For these reasons, we encourage all pastors and parish committees undertaking renovations or new constructions to keep Christ crucified prominently displayed within the sanctuary.

As always, the Office of Worship is available to assist pastors with liturgical and theological resources to guide decisions regarding sacred art and architecture. Finally, a gentle reminder: if you are considering making any changes, big or small, to your parish church, please first write to the Archbishop to obtain his permission. This will ensure you receive the necessary guidance and resources to support your efforts. -RJV

Breaking the Host Before Consecration

DURING my seminary days, I remember a priest on the faculty who, at the moment in the Eucharistic Prayer when the words are spoken, "At the time he was betrayed and entered willingly into his Passion, he took bread and, giving thanks, broke it (priest cracks the host), and gave it to his disciples…", he would audibly break the host. As a seminarian, I found this gesture very cool—it seemed to bring the narrative to life. However, I later learned that this practice is not in line with the Church's liturgical norms.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) provides clear guidance on the structure and gestures of the Mass. It specifies that the breaking of the host, known as the *fraction rite,* occurs after the consecration, during the *Lamb of God:*

> *"The priest breaks the Eucharistic Bread. The gesture of breaking bread done by Christ at the Last Supper... signifies that the many faithful are made one body... The priest breaks the Bread and places a piece of the host in the chalice to signify the unity of the Body and Blood of the Lord."* (GIRM, no. 83)

Furthermore, the instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* addresses this specific issue:

> *"In some places, there has existed an abuse by which the priest breaks the host at the time of the consecration in the Holy Mass. This abuse is contrary to the tradition of the Church. It is reprobated and is to be corrected with haste."* (Redemptionis Sacramentum, no. 55)

While the intention behind breaking the host at that moment may be to vividly illustrate the Last Supper narrative, it's essential to remember that the liturgy is not a reenactment but a sacred mystery that transcends time. The prescribed gestures and their timing are deeply rooted in theological significance and centuries of tradition. -RJV

The Deacon's Bench

Revisiting the Gestures of the Deacon at Mass

From time to time, I receive thoughtful questions from our deacons about liturgical practice—questions that show not only their desire to serve faithfully, but also their attention to the beauty and clarity of the rites we celebrate. Recently, one such question about gestures during Mass prompted me to revisit this topic, some of which I've addressed before, but it's certainly worth another look.

Let's begin with a central moment of the Mass: the final doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM 180) makes it clear: at this point, the deacon stands beside the priest, elevating the chalice while the priest lifts the paten with the host. This is done in silence. The deacon does not join in proclaiming or singing the doxology. His role is to assist visually and physically, allowing the unity of voice and gesture to reinforce the singular nature of this moment of praise to the Triune God.

Another gesture that often raises questions concerns the dismissal. According to GIRM 185, after the blessing, the deacon dismisses the people with hands joined, saying, *"Go forth, the Mass is ended."* or another formula approved for use. Even if the deacon earlier invited the people to bow their heads for the blessing with the phrase, *"Bow down for the blessing,"* his hands remain joined. The same is true when offering the greeting before the Gospel— "The Lord be with you"—and the invitation to offer the sign of peace.

Why hands joined? It's a good question. Gestures such as extending the hands during greetings or blessings are considered presidential acts—those proper to the one who presides, namely, the priest or bishop. The deacon, while possessing his own distinct liturgical role, is not the celebrant and therefore refrains from extending his hands during those parts of the liturgy that are not his to lead. Even the celebrant, when acting without a deacon, keeps his hands joined when saying "The Lord be with you" before the Gospel or inviting the sign of peace. These are not greetings in the conventional sense, but ritual monitions—sacred cues that draw the assembly more deeply into the action of the Mass.

That said, there are moments outside of Mass when a deacon does extend his hands—for instance, when presiding at a Liturgy of the Word, a Communion service, or the Liturgy of the Hours. In those instances, the deacon is the presiding minister and takes on the gestures proper to that role, including the open-handed liturgical greeting.

In all things, the gestures of the deacon should reflect clarity, reverence, and unity with the Church's liturgical discipline. These actions, though they may seem small, communicate something profound: that our worship is not ours to improvise, but a sacred inheritance to receive, treasure, and hand on. -RJV

Sing to the Lord—but not with a ciborium in hand

Every liturgical action has its meaning and place within the sacred mysteries we celebrate. While the faithful rightly join in a Communion hymn during the distribution of the Eucharist—a beautiful sign of unity and shared participation—the same cannot be said for the priest, deacon, or extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. These ministers are not meant to sing during the distribution of Communion. Why? Because their attention, reverence, and entire presence should be oriented toward the mystery they are handling: the Body and Blood of the Lord.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) clearly outlines the role of ministers during Communion. Paragraph 86 describes the Communion chant as "sung while the priests and the faithful receive the Sacrament," but the chant is meant for the assembly. It is not directed at the ministers who are distributing the Eucharist.

Furthermore, the Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (2004), issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, reminds us:

> *"The faithful should receive Communion only from the sacred ministers, who distribute it reverently and not in a hurried manner. It is not permitted for the faithful to take the consecrated Bread or the sacred chalice by themselves, and still less to hand them on from one to another. The Communion must be distributed with reverence."* (Redemptionis Sacramentum, no. 94)

While this paragraph focuses on the mode of distribution, it underlines an important point: reverence is not merely a spiritual attitude—it is expressed through bodily comportment, attentiveness, and singular focus. Distributing Communion is a sacred task. It requires undivided attention—not multitasking.

There is also a practical consideration: singing while distributing the Body or Blood of Christ can compromise the clarity of the words "The Body of Christ" and the reverent response "Amen." This is not a moment for improvisation or personalization—it is the climax of the Mass, the direct encounter between the communicant and the Lord.

This is not to say that music has no place during Communion. Quite the contrary—the Communion chant or hymn accompanies the procession and is an important means by which the Church expresses her unity in receiving the Lord. But ministers—whether clergy or laity—are called to minister, not to sing at that moment.

Let the faithful sing with joy and devotion. Let the ministers distribute with reverence and focus. -RJV

As always, if you or someone on your staff has any questions in regard to the liturgy, know that the Office of Worship is here to support you.
Feel free to send us your questions.
rvigoa@theadom.org

Archdiocese of Miami

Music Department

Office of Worship & Spiritual Life

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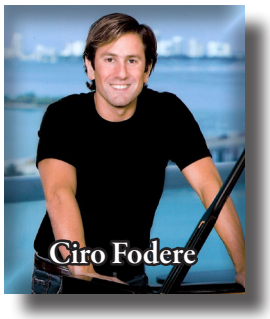

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