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Audience with participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, on the theme: “*Euntes parate nobis Pascha*” (Lk 22:8). Pathways of liturgical formation for ordained ministers and lay faithful”, taking place in Rome from 6 to 9 February 2024.

The following is the Pope’s address to those present at the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters!

I meet you on the occasion of your Plenary Assembly. I greet the Cardinal Prefect and all of you, members, consultants, and collaborators of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

Sixty years on from the promulgation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the words we read in its Proem, with which the Fathers declared the Council’s purpose, do not cease to enthuse. They are objectives that describe a precise will to reform the Church in her fundamental dimensions: to make the Christian life of the faithful grow more and more every day; to adapt the institutions subject to change better to the needs of our time; to foster that which can contribute to the union of all believers in Christ; to reinvigorate that which serves to call all to the bosom of the Church (cf. SC, 1). It is a task of spiritual, pastoral, ecumenical and missionary renewal. And in order to accomplish it, the Council Fathers knew where they had to begin, they knew there were “particularly cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the liturgy” (*ibid.*). It is like saying: without liturgical reform, there is no reform of the Church.

We can make such a statement only by understanding what the liturgy is in a theological sense, as the first paragraphs of the Constitution summarize admirably. A Church that does not feel the passion for spiritual

growth, that does not seek to speak comprehensibly to the men and women of her time, that does not grieve for the division among Christians, that does not tremble with the eagerness to proclaim Christ to the nations, is a sick Church, and these are the symptoms.

Every instance of Church reform is always a matter of spousal fidelity: the Bride Church will always be more beautiful the more she loves Christ the Bridegroom, to the point of belonging totally to Him, to the point of full conformation to Him. And on this, I will say one thing about the ministries of women. The Church is woman, the Church is mother, the Church has her figure in Mary, and the Church-woman, whose figure is Mary, is more than Peter; that is, she is something else. One cannot reduce everything to ministeriality. The woman in herself has a very great symbol in the Church as woman, without reducing it to ministeriality. This is why I have said that every claim of reform of the Church is always a question of spousal fidelity, because she is woman. The Council Fathers knew that it was necessary to place the liturgy at the centre, because it is the quintessential place to meet the living Christ. The Holy Spirit, which is the valuable gift of the Bridegroom Himself, with His cross, provided for the Bride, making possible that *actuosa participatio* that continually inspires and renews the baptismal life.

The scope of liturgical reform – in the broadest context of the renewal of the Church – is precisely to “bring to life the kind of formation of the faithful and ministry of pastors that will have their summit and source in the liturgy” (Instruction *Inter oecumenici*, 26 September 1964, 5).

For all this to happen, then, liturgical formation is necessary, that is, formation *in* the liturgy and *from* the liturgy, on which you are reflecting during these days. It is not a specialization for a few experts, but rather an inner disposition of all the people of God. This naturally does not exclude a priority in the formation of those who, by virtue of the sacrament of Orders, are called to be mystagogues, that is, to take the faithful by the hand and accompany them in their knowledge of the holy mysteries. I encourage you to continue in your efforts so that pastors know how to lead the people to the good pasture of the liturgical celebration, where the proclamation of Christ who died and rose again becomes a concrete experience of his life-transforming presence.

In the spirit of synodal collaboration among the Dicasteries – advocated in *Praedicate Evangelium* (cf. 8) – I hope that the question of liturgical formation of ordained ministers may be treated also with the Dicastery for Culture and Education, the Dicastery for the Clergy and the Dicastery for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life, so that each one may offer its own specific contribution. If “the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; [and] at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows” (SC 10), it is necessary to ensure that the formation of ordained ministers also increasingly has a liturgical-sapiential imprint, both in the curriculum of theological studies and in the life experience of seminaries.

Lastly, as we prepare new formation paths for ministers, we must at the same time think of those intended for the people of God. Starting with the assemblies that gather on the Lord’s Day and the feasts of the liturgical year: these constitute the first concrete opportunity for liturgical formation. And so, too, can be other moments when people participate more in the celebrations and their preparation: I am thinking of patronal feasts, or the Sacraments of Christian initiation. Prepared with pastoral care, they become favourable occasions for people to rediscover and deepen the meaning of celebrating the mystery of salvation today.

“Go and prepare the Passover for us” (Lk 22:8): these words of Jesus, which inspire your reflections in these days, express the Lord’s desire to have us around the table of his Body and Blood. They are an imperative that reaches us like a loving plea: to engage in liturgical formation is to respond to this invitation so that “we may eat the Passover” and live a Paschal existence, both personal and communal.

Dear brothers and sisters, your task is great and beautiful: to work so that God’s people may grow in the awareness and joy of encountering the Lord by celebrating the holy mysteries and, in encountering him, have life in his name. I thank you so much for your commitment and I bless you from my heart. May the Blessed Virgin protect you. And please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

