



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS,
SIGNED BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE CARDINAL PIETRO PAROLIN,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 71st NATIONAL LITURGICAL WEEK**

[Cremona, 23-26 August 2021]

Most Reverend Excellency,

On the happy occasion of the 71st National Liturgical Week, which will take place in the city of Cremona from 23 to 26 August, the Holy Father, Pope Francis is pleased to send his auspicious word to you, the collaborators of the Centre for Liturgical Action, to the hosting Diocese and its Pastor and to all those who will take part in these important days of study.

The Supreme Pontiff joins in the shared thanksgiving to the Lord, since it is possible to hold the event this year, after the sad moment of last year, when, following the well-known conditions of the spreading pandemic, the already scheduled event had to be postponed. This painful decision has made it possible, however, to confirm in a new light the selected theme, which is intended to study further some aspects and situations of celebration, which have been severely tested by the onset and spread of Covid-19 and the restrictions which have been necessary to contain it.

Indeed, the theme you will be dealing with concerns the *gathering in unum* of the Lord's disciples to carry out his command to "do this in memory of me" (Lk 22:19c): "Where two or three are gathered in my name ..." (Mt 18:20). *Communities, liturgies and territories*. The weekly gathering in the "name of the Lord", which from the very beginning has been perceived by Christians as an indispensable reality and indissolubly linked to their identity, was severely undermined during the most acute phase of the spread of the pandemic. But love for the Lord and pastoral creativity motivated pastors and lay faithful to explore other ways to nourish the communion of faith and love with the Lord and with their brothers and sisters, while waiting to be able to return to the fullness of the Eucharistic celebration in peace and safety. It was a difficult and painful wait, illuminated by the mystery of the Lord's Cross and fruitful in many works of care, fraternal love and service to the

people who suffered most from the consequences of the health emergency.

The sad experience of last year's liturgical "fast", highlighted the goodness of the long journey made since the Second Vatican Council, along the path mapped out by the Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium. The time of deprivation made it possible to perceive "the importance of the divine liturgy for the life of Christians, who find therein that objective mediation required by the fact that Jesus Christ is not an idea or a sentiment, but a living Person, and his Mystery a historical event. The prayer of Christians passes through tangible mediations: Sacred Scripture, the Sacraments, liturgical rites, the community. In Christian life, the corporeal and material sphere cannot be disregarded, because in Jesus Christ it became the way of salvation. We could say that we should pray with the body too: the body enters into prayer" (Pope Francis, General Audience, 3 February 2021).

The liturgy "suspended" during the long period of confinement, and the difficulties of the subsequent resumption, confirmed what had already been found in the Sunday assemblies of the Italian peninsula, an alarming indication of the advanced stage of the change of epoch. We observe how in people's real lives the very perception of time and, consequently, of Sunday itself, of space, has changed, with repercussions on the way of being and feeling as a community, people, family and of the relationship with the territory. The Sunday assembly thus finds itself unbalanced in terms of generational presences, cultural inhomogeneity, and the difficulty of finding a harmonious integration in parish life, to be truly the pinnacle of all its activities and source of missionary dynamism to bring the Gospel of mercy to the geographical and existential peripheries.

The Holy Father hopes that the National Liturgical Week, with its proposals for reflection and moments of celebration, albeit in the integrated mode, both in person and by telematic means, may identify and suggest some lines of liturgical pastoral care to be offered to parishes, so that Sunday, the Eucharistic assembly, the ministries and the rite may emerge from that marginality towards which they seem inexorably to fall, and may recover their centrality in the faith and spirituality of believers. The recent publication of the third edition of the Roman Missal and the willingness of the Italian Bishops to accompany it with a robust revival of the liturgical formation of God's holy people augurs well in this direction.

His Holiness greets with joy the celebration of the 71st National Liturgical Week, which is being held in a territory that has suffered greatly as a result of the pandemic and which has seen so much good flourish in order to alleviate this immense suffering. He assures you of his prayers and imparts a heartfelt Apostolic Blessing to Your Excellency, to the Bishop of the host Diocese, H.E. Archbishop Antonio Napolioni, to the other Bishops, priests, deacons, and consecrated people, and to the speakers and all the participants.

In adding my personal good wishes, I avail myself of the occasion to confirm my feelings of genuine esteem.

Pietro Card. Parolin
Secretary of State

L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly Edition in English, 3 September 2021

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana