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Audience with participants in the course at the Pontifical Saint Anselm Institute for diocesan heads of liturgical celebrations

The following is the address delivered by the Holy Father Francis this morning during the audience with participants in the international course for the formation of diocesan heads of liturgical celebrations, on the theme “Living liturgical action fully”, taking place at the Pontifical Saint Anselm Institute from 16 to 20 January:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

And I apologize for the delay, but it has been a hectic morning.

I thank the Father Abbot Primate for his words; I greet the Magnificent Rector and the Dean of the Pontifical Liturgical Institute, the professors and the students; and I greet the Cardinal Prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments] and the Monsignor Secretary – thank you for being here. I am pleased to welcome you and I have appreciated the initiative of organizing a formative itinerary addressed to those who prepare and guide the prayer of diocesan communities, in communion with the bishops and in the service of the dioceses.

This course, which is now coming to an end, is in keeping with the indications of the Apostolic Letter *Desiderio desideravi* on liturgical formation. Indeed, the conduct of celebrations demands preparation and commitment. We bishops, in our ministry, are well aware of this, because we need collaboration on the part of those who prepare the liturgies and who help us fulfil our mandate of presiding over the prayer of the holy people. This service of yours to the liturgy requires, besides in-depth knowledge, a profound pastoral awareness. I rejoice to see that once again you are renewing your commitment to the study of the liturgy. As Saint Paul VI said, it is the “primary source of that divine exchange in which the life of God is communicated to us; it is the first school of our soul” (*Allocution for the closing of the Second Session of Vatican Council II*, 4 December 1963). Therefore, the liturgy cannot be fully possessed, it is not learned like notions, crafts, human skills. It is the *primary art* of the

Church, that which constitutes and characterizes her.

I would like to entrust you with some insights for this service of yours, which is set within the context of the implementation of the liturgical reform.

Today we no longer talk about the “master of ceremonies”, that is, the one who takes care of “sacred ceremonies”; rather, the liturgical books refer to the master of celebrations. And the master teaches you the liturgy when he guides you in the encounter with the Paschal mystery of Christ; at the same time he must arrange everything so that the liturgy shines with decorum, simplicity and order (cf. *Caeremoniale Episcoporum*, 34). The master’s ministry is a diakonia; he collaborates with the bishop in the service of the community. This is way every bishop engages a master, who acts discreetly, diligently, not putting the rite before what it expresses, but helping to grasp its meaning and spirit, emphasizing through his actions that the centre is the crucified and risen Christ.

Especially in the cathedral, the director of episcopal celebrations coordinates, in collaboration with the bishop, all those who exercise a ministry during the liturgical action, so as to foster the fruitful participation of the people of God. One of the cardinal principles of Vatican II returns here: we must always keep the good of the communities, the pastoral care of the faithful (cf *ibid.*, 34) before our eyes, to lead the people to Christ and Christ to the people. It is the primary objective, which must be in first place also when you prepare and guide the celebrations. If we neglect this, we will have beautiful rites, but without strength, without flavour, without meaning, because they do not touch the heart and the existence of the people of God. And this happens when it is not the bishop, the priest, who presides *de facto*, but the master of ceremonies, and when this role slips towards the master of ceremonies, it all ends. The presider is the one who presides, not the master of ceremonies. On the contrary, the more hidden the master of ceremonies is, the better, The less he is seen, the better, But he coordinates it all. It is Christ who stirs the heart; it is the encounter with him that attracts the Spirit. “A celebration that does not evangelize is not authentic” (*Desiderio desideravi*, 37). It is a “ballet”, a beautiful ballet, aesthetic, beautiful, but it is not an authentic celebration.

One of the aims of the Council was to accompany the faithful in recovering the capacity to live liturgical action fully and to be astonished at what happens in the celebration under our very eyes (cf. *Desiderio desideravi*, 31). Note that it does not speak about aesthetic joy, for example, or the aesthetic sense, no, but rather wonder. Wonder is different to aesthetic pleasure: it is the encounter with God. Only the encounter with the Lord gives you wonder. How can this objective be achieved? The answer is already found in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. In paragraph 14, it recommends the formation of the faithful, but – the Constitution says – “it would be futile to entertain any hopes of realizing thus unless the pastors themselves, in the first place, become thoroughly imbued with the spirit and power of the liturgy, and undertake to give instruction about it. A prime need, therefore, is that attention be directed, first of all, to the liturgical instruction of the clergy”. Therefore, the master himself first grows in the school of the liturgy and participates in the pastoral mission of forming the clergy and the faithful.

One of the most complex aspects of the reform is its practical implementation, or rather the way in which what was established by the Council Fathers is translated into daily life. And among the primary responsibilities of practical implementation there is indeed the master, who alongside the director of the office for liturgical pastoral ministry accompanies the dioceses, the communities, the priests and other ministers in implementing the celebratory praxis indicated by the Council. This is done primarily by celebrating. How did we learn how to serve Mass as children? By watching our older friends do it. It is that formation *from* the liturgy that I wrote about in *Desiderio desideravi*. Decorum, simplicity and order are achieved when everyone, gradually throughout the course of the years, attending the rite, celebrating it, living it, understand what they must do. Of course, as in a large orchestra, each person must know their own part, the movements, the gestures, the texts they pronounce or sing; then the liturgy can be a symphony of praise, a symphony learned by the *lex orandi* of the Church.

Schools of liturgical practice are being established at cathedrals. This is a good initiative. One reflects “mystagogically” on what is celebrated. The celebratory style is evaluated, to consider progress and aspects to be corrected. I encourage you to help seminary superiors to preside in the best way possible, to take care of

proclamation, gestures, signs, so that future priests, along with the study of liturgical theology, learn how to celebrate well: and this is the style of presiding. One learns by watching daily a priest who knows how to preside, how to celebrate, because he lives the liturgy and, when he celebrates, he prays. I urge you to also help those in charge of the ministries to prepare the liturgy of the parishes by starting small schools of liturgical formation, which combine fraternity, catechesis, mystagogy and celebratory praxis.

When the head of celebrations accompanies the bishop in a parish, it is good to highlight the celebratory style that is lived there. It is pointless to put on a nice “parade” when the bishop is there, and then to return to how it was before. Your task is not to arrange the rite for one day, but to propose a liturgy that is imitable, with those adaptations that the community can embrace in order to grow in the liturgical life. In this way, gradually, the celebratory style of the diocese grows. Indeed, going to the parishes and saying nothing in the face of liturgies that are a little slapdash, neglected, badly prepared, means not helping the communities, not accompanying them. Instead, delicately, with a fraternal spirit, it is good to help pastors reflect on the liturgy, to prepare them with the faithful. In so doing, the master of celebrations must use great pastoral wisdom: if he is in the midst of the people he will understand immediately and know well how to accompany his brethren, how to suggest to communities what is suitable and achievable, and what steps are necessary to rediscover the beauty of the liturgy and of celebrating together.

And finally, I urge you to cultivate silence. In this age, we talk, we talk… Silence. Especially before the celebrations – a moment that is at times taken for a social gathering. We talk: “Ah, how are you? Is everything going well? Why not?”. Silence helps the assembly and concelebrants to concentrate on what is to be done. Often sacristies are noisy before and after celebrations, but silence opens and prepares for the mystery: it is silene that enables you to prepare for the mystery, it permits its assimilation, and lets the echo of the Word that is listened to resound. Fraternity is beautiful; greeting one another is beautiful, but it is the encounter with Jesus that gives meaning to our gathering, to our coming together. We must rediscover and cherish silence!

I want to emphasize this a great deal. And here I will say something that is linked to silence, but for priests. Please, the homilies: they are a disaster. At times I hear someone: “Yes, I went to Mass in that parish… yes, a good lesson of philosophy, forty, forty-five minutes… Eight, ten, no more! And always a thought, a sentiment and an image. Let people take something home with them. In *Evangelii Gaudium* I wanted to emphasize this. And I said it many times, because it is something that we end up not understanding: the homily is not a conference, it is a sacramental. The Lutherans say that it is a sacrament, it is a sacramental – I think it is the Lutherans – it is a sacramental, not a conference. It is prepared in prayer, it is prepared with an apostolic spirit. Please, the homilies, which are a disaster in general.

Dear friends, before bidding you farewell, I would like once more to express my encouragement for what you do in the service of the implementation of the reform that the Council Fathers entrusted to us. Let us all strive to continue the good work that was initiated. Let us help communities to live the liturgy, to let themselves be shaped by it, so – as the Scripture says – “let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price” (*Rev* 22:17). Let us offer to everyone the fresh water that springs abundantly from the liturgy of the Church.

I wish you good work, and I bless you from my heart. And please, I ask you to pray for me, don’t forget. Thank you!