



The Liturgy: the “today” of salvation history

The following are extracts from the Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis Desiderio Desideravi on Liturgical Formation of the People of God, 29 June 2022.

2. “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” (Lk 22:15)

These words of Jesus, with which the account of the Last Supper opens, are the crevice through which we are given the surprising possibility of intuiting the depth of the love of the persons of the Most Holy Trinity for us.

3. Peter and John were sent to make preparations to eat that Passover, but in actual fact, all of creation, all of history — which at last was on the verge of revealing itself as the history of salvation — was a huge preparation for that Supper. Peter and the others are present at that table, unaware and yet necessary. Necessary because every gift, to be gift, must have someone disposed to receive it. In this case, the disproportion between the immensity of the gift and the smallness of the one who receives it is infinite, and it cannot fail to surprise us. Nonetheless, through the mercy of the Lord, the gift is entrusted to the Apostles so that it might be carried to every man and woman.

4. No one had earned a place at that Supper. All had been invited. Or better said: all had been drawn there by the burning desire that Jesus had to eat that Passover with them. He knows that he is the Lamb of that Passover meal; he knows that he *is* the

Passover. This is the absolute newness, the absolute originality, of that Supper, the only truly new thing in history, which renders that Supper unique and for this reason “the Last Supper,” unrepeatably. Nonetheless, his infinite desire to re-establish that communion with us that was and remains his original design, will not be satisfied until every man and woman, *from every tribe, tongue, people and nation* (Rev 5:9), shall have eaten his Body and drunk his Blood. And for this reason, that same Supper will be made present in the celebration of the Eucharist until he returns again.

5. The world still does not know it, but everyone is *invited to the supper of the wedding of the Lamb* (Rev 19:9). To be admitted to the feast all that is required is the wedding garment of faith which comes from the hearing of his Word (cf. Rom 10:17). The Church tailors such a garment to fit each one with the whiteness of a garment *bathed in the blood of the Lamb*. (Rev 7:14). We must not allow ourselves even a moment of rest, knowing that still not everyone has received an invitation to this Supper or knowing that others have forgotten it or have got lost along the way in the twists and turns of human living. This is what I spoke of when I said, “I dream of a

‘missionary option’, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.” *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 27). I want this so that all can be seated at the Supper of the sacrifice of the Lamb and live from Him.

6. Before our response to his invitation — well before! — there is his desire for us. We may not even be aware of it, but every time we go to Mass, the first reason is that we are drawn there by his desire for us. For our part, the possible response — which is also the most demanding asceticism — is, as always, that surrender to this love, that letting ourselves be drawn by him. Indeed, every reception of communion of the Body and Blood of Christ was already desired by him in the Last Supper.

7. The content of the bread broken is the cross of Jesus, his sacrifice of obedience out of love for the Father. If we had not had the Last Supper, that is to say, if we had not had the ritual anticipation of his death, we would have never been able to grasp how the carrying out of his being condemned to death could have been in fact *the* act of perfect worship, pleasing to the Father, the only true act of worship, the only true liturgy. Only a few hours after the Supper, the apostles could have seen in the cross of Jesus, if they could have borne the weight of it, what it meant for Jesus to say, “body offered,” “blood poured out.” It is this of which we make memorial in every Eucharist. When the Risen One returns from the dead to break the bread for the disciples at Emmaus, and for his disciples who had gone

back to fishing for fish and not for people on the Sea of Galilee, that gesture of breaking the bread opens their eyes. It heals them from the blindness inflicted by the horror of the cross, and it renders them capable of “seeing” the Risen One, of believing in the Resurrection.

8. If we had somehow arrived in Jerusalem after Pentecost and had felt the desire not only to have information about Jesus of Nazareth but rather the desire still to be able to meet him, we would have had no other possibility than that of searching out his disciples so that we could hear his words and see his gestures, more alive than ever. We would have had no other possibility of a true encounter with him other than that of the community that celebrates. For this reason, the Church has always protected as its most precious treasure the command of the Lord, “Do this in memory of me.”

9. From the very beginning the Church was aware that this was not a question of a representation, however sacred it be, of the Supper of the Lord. It would have made no sense, and no one would have been able to think of “staging” — especially before the eyes of Mary, the Mother of the Lord — that highest moment of the life of the Master. From the very beginning the Church had grasped, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, that that which was visible in Jesus, that which could be seen with the eyes and touched with the hands, his words and his gestures, the concreteness of the incarnate Word — everything of Him had passed into the celebration of the sacraments. **[1]**

[1] Cf. Leo Magnus, *Sermo LXXIV: De ascensione Domini II, 1*: «quod [...] Redemptoris nostri conspicuum fuit, in sacramenta transivit».