

THE PASCHAL MYSTERY AND “FULL, ACTIVE, CONSCIOUS PARTICIPATION”

Pope Benedict makes a connection in his Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (paragraphs ##52 and 55) that, once it is made, is obvious. It's not the connection we always think of, however, and therefore it's worth an extra emphasis for us.

What is really being asked for by the Second Vatican Council's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium*, when it calls for 'full, active and conscious participation' in our worship? For many, the original emphasis was one of getting people's personal prayer books and rosaries out of their hands and getting them to respond and sing as a congregation—as a body truly assembled—rather than being a series of individuals engaged in personal, private devotions while just happening to be in the same place at the same time. Singing and the restoration of the common greeting of peace were examples of ways of trying to make people aware of each other's presence as good things in worship.

Yet Pope Benedict makes a crucial distinction when he writes, "... 'participation' does not refer to mere external activity... the active participation called for by the Council must be understood in more substantial terms....Offering the immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him, [the congregation] should learn to make an offering of themselves."

Of all the conditions required for such 'fruitful participation' is "...the spirit of constant conversion which must mark the lives of all the faithful. Active participation in the eucharistic liturgy can hardly be expected if one approaches it superficially, without an examination of his or her life....A heart reconciled to God makes genuine participation possible." And, the Pope concludes, there can be no such participation "...without an accompanying effort to participate actively in the life of the Church as a whole, including a missionary commitment to bring Christ's love into the life of society."

So from all this we can see that what the Council, what the Church, actually desires of us is not only the ability to make a loud "Amen" when coming up to receive the Sacrament; not only a working knowledge of our hymnal, not only standing or sitting at the 'right time.' It is also of taking seriously the call to continual conversion: daily explicit desire to come closer to Christ. It is a willingness to be carriers of the love of Jesus to others in our ordinary lives of work, school, friends, family, relaxation. Are we able to bring to the liturgy and take from the liturgy the life of Christ, thus guaranteeing a true and authentic participation in the liturgy?

May we all, always, enjoy the preparation for, the celebration, and the fruits of 'full, active, conscious participation' at Eucharist.