

Homily by Bishop Angel T. Hobayan¹

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the invitation to celebrate Mass during this conference.

It is truly with immense joy and happiness that I greet you all today, my dear brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ. I come from the Philippines, a country known for its beauty and for the poverty in which the majority of its 80 million inhabitants live. But if the Philippines are well known throughout the world, it is also because of the priceless treasure of the Catholic faith that was brought to our shores and to our ancestors by the courageous European missionaries in the early years of the 15th century. They preached the Gospel tirelessly, and they even went so far as to give their lives to convert our people to the Catholic faith.

Our people have preserved this faith to this day, and the majority of the baptized who identify as Catholic continue to practice it, though not fully or completely. Nevertheless, 83% of Filipinos are baptized Catholics, representing approximately 67,230,000 people. In my humble opinion, I consider this reality to be an immense treasure. Imagine this: a group of islands surrounded by populations that resolutely profess diverse and varied religions such as Shintoism, Buddhism, and above all Islam—not to mention the millions of men and women around us who profess no religion at all.

It was with great joy that I accepted the invitation to celebrate Mass during this 8th symposium of the International Center for Liturgical Studies; that said, I initially had a hard time understanding the reasons why these symposia have been held since 1995. I made a serious effort to better understand your objectives and activities, and in doing so, I became aware of one of the most important factors by which we, as Filipino Catholics, have preserved the Catholic faith in our country. That factor is the presence of the priest in every community—whether it be a parish, an interparochial ecclesial movement, or the basic ecclesial communities, structures that the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines adopted in 1991, seeing them as “our way of being the Church in the Philippines.” When I speak of the priest’s presence, I am referring specifically to his presence in the community, particularly when he celebrates Mass. In most of our villages, the community eagerly awaits the annual celebration of its patron saint. And the celebration of Mass is at the heart of each of these feasts. Furthermore, for every Filipino Catholic, Mass is an indispensable part of any social or family event, such as a baptism, a wedding, the anniversary of a death, and ceremonies of thanksgiving—whether simple or solemn.

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From this perspective, I believe that the objective of the International Center for Liturgical Studies—namely, “to promote awareness and a better understanding of the Roman Catholic Church’s conception of the traditional liturgy [...] in complete fidelity to the Holy See ”—is a truly commendable endeavor insofar as it seeks to capture the value and dignity of this sacrament, which, in a certain sense, has fallen victim to the negative influence of certain movements that have obscured its authentic meaning within our Catholic tradition.

This is why I wish to recall what the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and the Divine Liturgy clarified in its instruction entitled *Inestimabile Donum*. Indeed, this document highlights numerous positive outcomes of the liturgical reforms introduced following the Second Vatican Council, such as:

- a) a more active and conscious participation, rooted in faith, in the liturgical mysteries;
- b) greater doctrinal and catechetical richness through the use of vernacular languages;
- c) a wider selection of biblical texts;
- d) a better understanding of liturgical life;
- e) positive efforts to bridge the gap between daily life and worship, between liturgical piety and personal piety, and between the liturgy and popular piety.

However, this same document sadly lists a number of frequent and varied abuses observed in different parts of the world, namely:

- a) a confusion of roles, particularly regarding the ministry of priests and the role of the laity, such as the recitation of the Eucharistic Prayer by the entire assembly, homilies delivered by laypeople, and the distribution of Communion by laypeople while priests refrain from doing so;
- b) an ever-increasing loss of the sense of the sacred, which is concretely expressed by the abandonment of liturgical vestments, the celebration of the Eucharist outside the church without real necessity, a lack of reverence and respect for the Blessed Sacrament, etc.; ; and,
- c) a misunderstanding of the ecclesial nature of the liturgy, as evidenced by the use of secular texts, the proliferation of unapproved Eucharistic prayers, and the manipulation of liturgical texts for political and social purposes.

This program, launched by the International Center for Liturgical Studies and diligently pursued for the past eight years, is a fruitful response to the call issued by Pope John Paul II to pastors and theologians in the apostolic letter *Ecclesia Dei*:

But all pastors and the rest of the faithful must also have a new awareness not only of the legitimacy but also of the richness that the diversity of charisms and traditions of spirituality and apostolate represents for the Church. This diversity also constitutes the beauty of unity in variety: such is the symphony that, under the action of the Holy Spirit, the earthly Church raises up to heaven.

I would also like to draw the attention of theologians and other experts in ecclesiastical science so that they, too, may feel called to respond to the present circumstances. Indeed, the breadth and depth of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council require a renewed effort at deeper study, which will help to highlight the Council's continuity with tradition, especially regarding points of doctrine that—perhaps because of their novelty—have not yet been fully understood in certain sectors of the Church.

He reaffirmed these thoughts when he declared, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of *Ecclesia Dei*, on October 26, 1998:

I hope that all members of the Church will remain heirs to the faith received from the Apostles, celebrated with dignity and fidelity in the holy mysteries, with fervor and beauty, so that they may increasingly receive grace and live a deep and intimate relationship with the Holy Trinity.

I would like to conclude this brief reflection on a personal note: I am a product of both the earlier liturgical movement and the newer one. Ordained a priest in 1955, I celebrated the traditional Mass for a number of years. I was studying in Rome when the Second Vatican Council took place, and since then I have celebrated the Eucharist with joy and enthusiasm according to the liturgical reform. Now that I have been given the opportunity to celebrate the Mass I used to celebrate when I was a young priest, I am very happy to see this beautiful tradition preserved, as I approach the final years of my priestly ministry before stepping down from the episcopal office I have held for 20 years. I pray that, as I mentioned at the outset, the presence of the priest celebrating—with love and devotion—the Eucharist in our communities will continue to preserve and help spread faith in Christ, with complete trust and fidelity to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.