

CORPUS CHRISTI 2010

Homily given by Fr. Dennis Koliński, SJC

St. Peter's Church in Volo

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You have heard me speak on more than one occasion about the crisis of faith that we have in our culture today, especially in regard to belief in the Real Presence. Today is Corpus Christi, the Solemnity of the Lord's Precious Body and Blood, and I'll say it again—70% of American Catholics don't believe that the Eucharist IS the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. The reasons behind this are many and complex but the solution to this problem is perhaps simpler than one may think. Today, I'd like to present for your reflection some thoughts on two matters, which have the potential to exert a profound influence on Catholics' belief or non-belief in the Real Presence. Some of the remarks will be mine but much of what I will say today is taken from the statements of three men, who are far more important and who have much more authority in liturgical matters than I do: Pope Benedict XVI, Cardinal Cañizares Llovera, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments and Papal Master of Ceremonies, Msgr. Guido Marini.

The first topic is the manner in which we present ourselves for Communion. Last year, Pope Benedict said that "society speaks with the clothes that it wears."¹ "In effect, we all speak by the clothes that we wear. Dress is a language, as is every form of external expression. The liturgy also speaks with the clothes it wears, and with all its expressive forms, which are many and rich, ever ancient and ever new. ... The external signs have to be in harmonious relation with the mystery of salvation in place in the rite."² This means that what we wear to Mass has to be "in harmonious relation with the mystery of salvation in place in the rite." This doesn't mean that you have to wear a suit every time you attend Mass, but it does mean that what you wear should be appropriate to what you are attending: the liturgy of heaven and an encounter with Jesus Christ, the King of Kings Himself. So, when you come to church what do your clothes say?

Some will say that what really matters is not what one is wearing but what one has in one's heart. But let's be truthful. If you put more care into dressing appropriately for a job interview or your sister's wedding, but not for Mass, what does that say about what's in your heart? If something is really important, it is usually reflected on the outside. We have to be honest. Many people have lost a sense of what is appropriate. A tank top and running shorts are not appropriate attire for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

The other matter on which Pope Benedict, Cardinal Cañizares and Msgr Marini have commented, that I present for your reflection today, is the manner in which we receive Holy Communion. Few Catholics in this country know that it is still the universal norm of the Church that Communion be distributed to the faithful directly on the tongue and that the custom of receiving in the hand is only what is called an indult, that is a special permission, which is not permanent and which may be rescinded at any time. Communion in the hand is not a "right." It is a concession given for the Church in this country that is an exception to the rule in the rest of the Catholic world.

Unfortunately, a seemingly small has given rise to a widespread lack of reverence for the Blessed Sacrament. And this is precisely why Pope Benedict asks that when people receive Communion from him, they receive it not only on the tongue as has always been the practice of popes, but also kneeling, in order to give greater prominence to the due reverence

with which we must approach the Body of Christ.³ Cardinal Cañizares says that this is because “Communion kneeling signifies respect for God, it is the heart of man which prostrates itself before the One Who loves him unto the end.”⁴ “Kneeling in adoration before the Eucharist,” says Pope Benedict, “is the most valid and radical remedy against the idolatries of yesterday and today. Kneeling before the Eucharist is a profession of freedom: One who bows to Jesus cannot and must not prostrate himself before any earthly power, no matter how strong.”⁵ Last July, Cardinal Cañizares said: “It is the mission of the Congregation for Divine Worship and Sacraments to work to promote Pope Benedict’s emphasis on the traditional practices of liturgy, such as reception of Communion on the tongue while kneeling.”⁶

Now, before some of you begin making accusations, let it be known for the record that I am not forcing anyone to receive Communion any specific way. In fact, there are some people, who shouldn’t come to the rail because they might fall down and getting hurt. But ask yourselves: Is it wise to ignore what the Holy Father is telling us?

Some may say that it’s really not that important, that it’s just a matter of preference for this form or that form. But Cardinal Cañizares begs to differ, saying that “it is not just a matter of form. What does it mean to receive Communion in the mouth? What does it mean to kneel before the Most Holy Sacrament? What does it mean to kneel during the consecration at Mass? It means adoration, it means recognizing the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist; it means respect and an attitude of faith of a man who prostrates before God because he knows that everything comes from Him, and we feel speechless, dumbfounded, before the wondrousness, his goodness, and his mercy. That is why it is not the same to place the hand, and to receive Communion in any fashion, other than doing it in a respectful way; it is not the same to receive Communion kneeling or standing up, because all these signs indicate a profound meaning. What we have to grasp is that profound attitude of the man who prostrates himself before God, and that is what the Pope wants.”⁷

In a recent conference on the subject of Pope Benedict’s liturgical renewal, Papal Master of Ceremonies, Msgr. Guido Marini, shed further light on this. “Adoration is the recognition, filled with wonder ... of [God’s] omnipotent and provident Lordship. ... Before the ineffable beauty of God’s charity, which takes form in the mystery of the Incarnate Word, who for our sake has died and is risen, and which finds its sacramental manifestation in the liturgy, there is nothing left for us but to be left in adoration. ... Here is the reason why everything in the liturgical act, through the nobility, the beauty, and the harmony of the exterior sign, must be conducive to adoration, to union with God: this includes the music, the singing, the periods of silence, the manner of proclaiming the Word of the Lord, and the manner of praying, the gestures employed, the liturgical vestments and the sacred vessels and other furnishings, as well as the sacred edifice in its entirety. It is under this perspective that the decision of his Holiness, Benedict XVI, is to be taken into consideration, who, starting from the feast of Corpus Christi last year, has begun to distribute Holy Communion to the kneeling faithful directly on the tongue. By the example of this action, the Holy Father invites us to render visible the proper attitude of adoration before the greatness of the mystery of the Eucharistic presence of our Lord. An attitude of adoration which must be fostered all the more when approaching the most holy Eucharist in the other forms permitted today.”⁸

Following the Second Vatican Council, however, some argued that “the Eucharistic bread was given to us not to be looked at, but to be eaten. In the light of the Church’s experience of prayer, however, this was seen to be a false dichotomy. As Saint Augustine put

it: *'nemo autem illam carnem manducatur, nisi prius adoraverit; peccemus non adorando*—no one eats that flesh without first adoring it; we should sin were we not to adore it.' ... Receiving the Eucharist means adoring Him whom we receive. Only in this way do we become one with Him, and are given, as it were, a foretaste of the beauty of the heavenly liturgy."⁹ "For this reason, everything in the liturgy, and more specifically in the Eucharistic liturgy, must lead to adoration, everything in the unfolding of the rite must help one enter into the Church's adoration of her Lord."¹⁰

That is why Cardinal Cañizares said: "Communion kneeling and on the tongue, the use of Gregorian chant, are important matters than cannot be made light of in a frivolous or superficial manner. ... it is very important that the celebrations have and can foster the sense of the sacred, of mystery that revivifies the belief in the real presence of the Lord and the gift of God acting in it, such as adoration, respect, reverence, contemplation, prayer, praise, the action of grace, and many other things that run the risk of being watered down. When I participate in or see the liturgy of the Pope, which has already incorporated some of these elements, I am increasingly convinced that these elements are not unimportant, but instead have an expressive and educational power in and of themselves and in the truth of the celebration, and the lack of which is felt [when absent]."¹¹

In our "anything goes" culture, on the other hand, we often forget, or perhaps ignore, what people throughout history across all cultures have always known: that what we wear, what we do and how we do it conveys something just as much as the words that we speak. Many young people in our inner cities know this all too well because the wrong type of cap, the wrong color or the wrong way of wearing it may mean the difference between life and death. Everything we do carries a meaning.

Those of us, who are older remember that there were many changes after the Second Vatican Council. Some were good; some were very necessary. But looking back with hindsight, some weren't. At the time, some may have seemed like small changes but St. Thomas Aquinas once wrote that "little errors in the beginning lead to serious consequences in the end."¹² However, we have to be frank. Small changes in what we did and how we did them in the liturgy have led to serious consequences, which we now have to rectify. One of these consequences, an over-casual treatment of the Eucharist, coupled with a widespread loss of a sense of sin in which many Catholics don't feel a particular sense of culpability for what they do, has led us to the point where each one of us has to ask: "Do I really believe that this is what it is; that this is WHO the Church says it is? Do I really care?" When I receive Communion, do I "render visible the proper attitude of adoration before the greatness of the mystery of the Eucharistic presence of our Lord."¹³

¹ "Msgr. Guido Marini Speaks Again on the Liturgy, Its Forms and Its Importance," Interview of Monsignor Guido Marini, *Radici Cristiane*, March 2009, number 42 (New Liturgical Movement, 28 February 2009). (<http://www.newliturgicalmovement.org/2009/02/msgr-guido-marini-speaks-again-on.html>)

² "Msgr. Guido Marini Speaks."

³ "Cardinal Cañizares on Liturgical Reforms, *Summorum Pontificum*," New Liturgical Movement, 10 March 2009. (<http://www.newliturgicalmovement.org/2009/03/cardinal-canizares-on-liturgical.html>)

⁴ "Cardinal Cañizares on Communion Received Kneeling," New Liturgical Movement, 20 April 2009. (<http://www.newliturgicalmovement.org/2009/04/cardinal-canizares-on-communion.html>)

⁵ Wooden, Cindy, "Eucharist unites, strengthens, pope says at Corpus Christi Mass." Catholic News Service, 22 May 2008. (<http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0802797.htm>)

⁶ White, Hilary and Jalsevac, John, “Interview: Defenders of the Eucharist are Defenders of Life says Vatican Cardinal,” LifeSiteNews, 27 July 2009. (<http://www.lifesitenews.com/ldn/2009/jul/09072701.html>)

⁷ “Kneeling for communion and communion on the tongue: ‘Profound meaning,’ says Cañizares,” New Liturgical Movement, 14 December 2008. (<http://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/search?q=Kneeling+for+communion+>)

⁸ “Introduction to the Spirit of the Liturgy—Clergy Conference in Rome: Address of Msgr. Guido Marini, Papal Master of Ceremonies,” New Liturgical Movement 6 January 2010. (<http://www.newliturgicalmovement.org/2010/01/clergy-conference-in-rome-address-of.html>)

⁹ *Sacramentum caritatis*, 66.

¹⁰ “Introduction to the Spirit of the Liturgy.”

¹¹ “Cardinal Prefect of CDW on Liturgy as the Source and Summit, the Wider Application of *Summorum Pontificum*, on Continuity and a New Liturgical Movement,” New Liturgical Movement, 13 January 2010. (<http://www.newliturgicalmovement.org/2010/01/cardinal-prefect-of-cdw-on-liturgy-as.html>)

¹² Adler, Mortimer J., *Ten Philosophical Mistakes*, (Touchstone: New York, 1985), xiii.

(http://books.google.com/books?id=iPbeC0HVgjUC&pg=PR13&lpg=PR13&dq=thomas+aquinas+small+errors+serious+consequences&source=bl&ots=zpt9D7F8AB&sig=gmcI9fqIgF4FcojEs_JP0fMobvw&hl=en&ei=AHkKTO3YIIaONeTC2LUE&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=0CBwQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q&f=false)

¹³ “Introduction to the Spirit of the Liturgy.”