

Living  
the Liturgy



# Living the Liturgy



A Witness

NOTES FROM COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

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**S L / . N T**  
B O O K S

# LIVING THE LITURGY

## A Witness

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## INTRODUCTION

Francesco Braschi

“IN ITS WIDEST SENSE, the liturgy is humanity made aware that the adoration of God is its supreme meaning, and that work is the glory of God.” We should begin from a similar breadth of horizon if we want to approach this text of Father Giussani, which we can define as both *synthetic* and *fundamental*, with a genuine awareness of its meaning and value.

The *synthetic* character of the book comes not only from the circumstances of its origin (as the Note to the First Edition relates, it consists of “quick notes” collected from conversations that took place over eight years, from 1965 to 1973) but above all in its original intention. In these pages, in fact, Father Giussani strives to offer a comprehensive perspective and to teach a method that is capable of introducing us to the Christian liturgy as it is lived by the people of God. At the same time—and this is not to be taken for granted—he respects all the fullness and depth of meaning that the liturgy holds: for the vocation of each believer and, above all, by its nature as *Opus Dei*, the objective evidence of the presence of God as the subject of history.

For this reason, the meditations that we have in our hands reveal right away a characteristic that makes them stand out in the panorama of contemporary texts that flourished after the

liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council; that is, they avoid two approaches—only apparently opposed to each other—those of *archeology* and *liturgical sociology*.

The first approach consists not only in the literary-historical analysis of texts, of ritual forms and their development (an approach which is licit and indispensable for a correct comprehension of the Church's patrimony), but also in the clarification of the conditions for the correct celebration (through research of the most ancient texts) as *the* fundamental problem of the liturgy, to be resolved first by singling out the historical period taken as a paradigm (often accompanied by a devaluation of other moments in liturgical history) with its reconstruction in the mentality and contemporary praxis of individuals and communities.

Liturgical sociology, on the other hand, does not pay particular attention to the historical aspect but concentrates on researching the communication techniques that are held to be necessary for the rite to be adequate to the necessities and the receptive capacities of contemporary man (which often are limited and strongly concentrated on the horizontal-community dimension of the ritual gestures). If these techniques are not respected—they say—it would be difficult or even impossible to comprehend the liturgical action; this action would be in some way condemned to practical inefficacy.

Both of these positions—interchangeable in many different ways, as recent history shows—have in common a double risk: on one side, they see the liturgy as an activity the success of which resides first of all in the capacity of those (scholars, teachers, celebrants) who have the task of guiding it; on the other hand, they assign to themselves the limited task of “representing” (in the form that they hold to be correct) a reality—the relationship with God—that is substantiated and built elsewhere and that is in some way “made appropriate” to the individual believer and the community.

SUCH WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING the liturgy are not purely theoretical or able to be relegated to the years of the conciliar and



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post-conciliar reform but rather represent a true challenge for the faith as Pope Benedict XVI authoritatively reminded us at the Heiligenkreuz monastery in 2007 when, while speaking to the Cistercian monks, he said: “In all our efforts on behalf of the liturgy, the determining factor must always be our looking to God. We stand before God—he speaks to us and we speak to him. Whenever in our thinking we are only concerned about making the liturgy attractive, interesting and beautiful, the battle is already lost. Either it is *Opus Dei*, with God as its specific subject, or it is not.” And, on the same occasion, he added a parallel link between liturgy and theology: “In its desire to be recognized as a rigorously scientific discipline in the modern sense, theology can lose the life-breath given by faith. But just as a liturgy which no longer looks to God is already in its death throes, so too a theology which no longer draws its life-breath from faith ceases to be theology; it ends up as an array of more or less loosely connected disciplines” (Benedict XVI, Address at Heiligenkreuz Abbey, Austria, 9 September 2007).

From a distance of over ten years, in a context that sees the crumbling of the values most necessary to life, the meaning of these words is not only relevant but even more urgent, because the liturgy—even to those who still profess themselves to be believing and practicing Christians—often appears as a container to be filled with activities (or better, activism) or a place to live on the wave of sentiment, grabbing a few phrases or expressions that strike us at the moment.

We cannot escape from the clarity with which Pope Benedict specified that *the forgetfulness of the theological character of the liturgy and its intrinsic link with faith* is the ultimate reason for the frequent polarization (when it is not an outright contradiction) that is often seen, for example, between celebration and life, between liturgical archaism and instances of renewal, between faithfulness to tradition and creativity in celebration, between the modality of the approach to the word of God which they sharply separate—as if they were two different objects—the personal meditation of the Bible and its liturgical proclamation, between

the horizontal-communitarian and vertical-theological . . . until you end up with a deconstruction that fragments the Christian experience, reducing it to a series of irresolvable dualisms.

The Pope emeritus calls us to refuse every reductive approach, to look at the liturgy recognizing first of all that God is its *present subject* and that the essence of every celebratory action is the possibility of a gaze toward Him—because it is always from Him that the dialogue with humanity moves. This constitutes therefore an important indication of method, to be grasped before every other pastoral consideration, because it is useful to find again *the nexus between liturgy and faith*: a vital and constitutive link for both terms.

This is precisely the method of Father Giussani in these meditations. And this clarity of formulation makes the meditations that are re-proposed here—after 50 years—surprisingly current.

Their *synthetic* character, which we have already noted, can now be explained in the will and the capacity of the author to locate himself at a level that puts itself *before* any partiality: Father Giussani himself underlines it in the *Preface*:

If it is true that we can be struck in front of a phrase or some other text of the liturgy, we should be attentive not to reduce the richness of this meditation to a selection of phrases. This is not the center of the problem. We must educate ourselves not to meditate in that way on the liturgy because we would commit an error. Or, more than an error, a diminishing, a reduction of the attitude and the value of the presence of God. This reduction has happened often: the Bible, which is the story of the mystery of God in the world, was treated as the source of beautiful, just, and profound phrases, but this leaves to the side the context, the true word of God. In this way, we reduce the Bible to a support for our moral ideals. Instead of understanding the discourse of God as the new language that shatters our human wisdom, we have taken the word of God as a support for our wisdom, or even treated the Bible in an accommodating sense—that is, when a passage is interpreted according to the ear of our cultural mentality, instead of searching to make that

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mentality adequate to the meaning, to the communication, to the witness that sprang from this phrase.

We should approach the individual phrases of the liturgy as highlighted instances of a unique word. We should not spell them out, but harmonize them with the life of Christ in the Church. The liturgy is a conversation that does not end and is carried along by the power of grace, by the mystery of God in the world.

The correct way to approach the liturgy (to “harmonize” and not to “spell out,” that is, to break up the syllables, like a child who is learning to read) is to place ourselves as consciously as possible in front of a discourse that is *other* than our discourses, and to welcome “the discourse of God as the new language that shatters our human wisdom.” Consequently, every attempt to assimilate the Christian liturgy to a naturally human ritual, or to reduce it to a purely cultural or sociological discourse, not only constitutes a grave error of method (by not understanding the object, the word of God and His Presence in the world) but even more deeply, reveals the radical misrepresentation of the person who is the second actor (because the principal actor, as we have seen, is the Mystery), not as a participant or spectator of a sectarian cultural fact, but starting from the radicality of his nature as one “called,” the object of a vocation.

And so Giussani affirms in the first lines of this book: “belonging to the mystery of the Church,” in fact, constitutes “the ultimate and complete determinant of our vocation”; but precisely this “liturgical event” is revealed to be that “typical moment of the life of the Church” meditating on which constitutes an “act of adequate vigilance on the path that each of us has been assigned.” We are thus led by the hand to grasp what is the *fundamental* character of this book: the gaze on the liturgy that it fosters is an act that consolidates the vocational path of every believer (the path of life called to a faith that is recognized as vocation), anchoring it directly in the action of God which is *objectively recognizable*, present in the grace of the Sacraments.

Another keyword for understanding these pages is the reference to a *lived* liturgy. In Giussani's mind, this term is not exhausted in the eminently *practical* character of the reflections, stripped of every academicism and proposed to those who already participate daily in the liturgy. The *lived* liturgy is, for the author, the movement that is produced by the encounter between the Christian rite and the vocation of the individual, which we have first described as the true *method* for this encounter to become a living experience. This experience has a precise form, according to Giussani. In fact, "The lived liturgy constitutes the path of our morality" (p. XVIII) because its words enunciate the way that leads to conversion of heart, the newness that clothes "perception and judgment, feeling, decision, and action" (p. XIX) when listened to with obedience.

But this obedient listening, Giussani adds, beyond fostering conversion, defines our life understood as the expectation of the coming of the Lord, a coming that from the "place" of the liturgy passes then to daily life, which is vivified and nourished with meaning in the movement of the liturgical seasons, in which we are helped to "incarnate" the practice of the Sacraments (especially Confession and the Eucharist), connecting this practice to the presence of Christ in the world and in time.

THIS SUMMARY PRESENTATION OF the fundamental points of the Preface, following the method suggested by Giussani, which is the essential starting point to immerse ourselves in the more detailed meditations that constitute the rest of the text, already helps us intuit the richness of the perspective that is offered.

The *first part* of the volume takes up and describes the radicality of Giussani's approach to the sacrifice of the Mass: that gesture which—he affirms—is for us "the most important gesture in the whole history of the world," that is, "the death and resurrection of Christ." Even in this case, the nexus with the concrete experience of each believer is quickly established. Every believer is called to recognize in the Mass, and in every single gesture that constitutes it, "the paradigm, the intelligence, the inspiration, the impetus, the

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force of correcting everything, the capacity to understand everything, so that everything has meaning” (p. 2). The description of the different moments of the ritual never indulges in erudition as an end in itself: on the contrary, there is a constant call at the fundamental level to a judgment of faith, to the recognition that “the judgment of the value on my life and on that of the world is Christ dead and risen” (p. 6), which fact is never relegated to a group of past events, but which even today “is investing history . . . according to the presence that is moving the world to its destiny *through our lives*” (emphasis ours).

The *second part*, dedicated to the liturgical seasons and to a few of the most important feasts in the year (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, Trinity), is characterized by the detailed treatment of the modalities of the presence of Christ in history. But this word “history,” already so dense in meaning, receives in Giussani’s reading a plurality of senses: the liturgical year, in fact, in its articulation from Advent to Easter, represents the totality of the events of the Covenant between God and human beings (from the expectation of Israel to the coming of Christ, to the fulfillment of Easter and the time of the Church) but also the history of the personal encounter of each believer with the Mystery in the appropriation of the human event of the Savior and the generation of man and of the new people for whom Easter becomes the criterion of authenticity of the whole of individual and communitarian existence.

Thus, Advent is “the time of expectation, the time of the first sign of unity between our freedom and the freedom of God” (p. 23), which was lived by the prophets and now is proposed to us as the passage from *our* images and expectations of God to the welcoming of His being as Mystery. Christmas is the entrance into the world of “a new reality, a new presence,” starting from which “certainty becomes objective” with an interest only in the capacity that this newness of life possesses to “overwhelm each of us” (p. 32). Lent signals the time of “conversion,” understood first of all as the moment in which “the Word, the Christian discourse, should be born from our personal gaze on Jesus Christ,” and the

Lenten liturgy “is the supreme affirmation of this salvation that has come, Jesus Christ” (p. 41). Easter is “the definitive . . . which has already happened,” that “the world must journey again to comprehend” and whose hope “calls us out and makes us different from our environment” (p. 64). Ascension is the moment in which our Christian vocation becomes authentic—paradoxically—in the absence of the “manifestations of the power of Christ according to the mode of our expectation,” because in those conditions “his action coincides, is identified with the motivations and the working of our person” (p. 72). Pentecost manifests how the Holy Spirit may be in us “the principle of knowledge of the Father and the Son” as an “event existentially fulfilled” (p. 79).

The liturgy of the Most Holy Trinity, chosen by Father Giussani as the volume’s point of arrival, is “the foundational meditation, the alpha and omega of everything,” a “mystery hidden even though it has been revealed . . . which we will not be able to exhaust even in eternity when we will see Him face to face” and is defined as “the mystery of security, the mystery of certainty” (pp. 88, 89).

To let ourselves be guided by Father Giussani on this itinerary means being helped continually to recognize the richness and the coherence of the Christian path, of *every* Christian path: the path of the individual, of the community who celebrates, of the vocational companionship, of the entire Church, of creation as the work of God, directed toward Him as its fulfillment. The loss of horizon that continually afflicts and impoverishes our existence, marked as it is by individualism—often visible in the realm of prayer and liturgy—is a constant reminder of the absence of the person and finds in this volume an antidote, a medicine, that consists in the continual reconstruction of that openness of reason which the lived liturgy promotes, as little by little the presence of the Mystery is objectively revealed and attested.

And so, the *testimony* that emanates from the lived liturgy is also—in the first place—the testimony of Father Giussani himself, in his capacity of incarnating this comprehensive and totalizing gaze on reality, which to his eyes was truly the transparency of the presence of Christ. This gaze becomes available to us as well

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through these pages, whose nature demands that they not be read “sitting down” but rather as a kind of *vademecum*, to have in hand as we walk and as we look around us, to be able to continually enjoy an intelligence of reality that we continue to face. We remain grateful for an experience that is still possible and that is witness to the vitality of the charism entrusted to Father Giussani.





## PREFACE

THE FACT THAT GATHERS all of us together as the People of God is our belonging to the mystery of the Church.

The Church is the source of our personality, the ultimate and fullest determinant of our vocation. Therefore, in order to bring about an awareness that is appropriate to the path that each of us has been assigned, our meditation must do nothing other than follow the essential moment of the Church's life: that of the liturgical event.

In its widest sense, the liturgy is humanity made aware that the adoration of God is its supreme meaning, and that work is the glory of God. The beginning of the liturgical year, therefore, should always be the beginning or the renewal of an awareness that gives our life its true shape, that manifests in us the new creature willed by God, according to obedience to the Father. Each of us must respond to God and to the call of the mystery of the Church according to the grace that has been given to us, according to the "talent" that has been entrusted to us.

Saint Paul says: *Dum tempus habemus, operemur bonum* (Galatians 6:10). While we have time, let us act in accordance with the good. *Tempus* indicates the hour and the content of the hour; it corresponds therefore to the term "occasion." And this occasion is the word that has been spoken to us, the possibility that has been offered, an energy that we feel and that cannot be offered to us the hour after.

This meditation on the liturgy is a meditation on the educational discourse given by the Church. Therefore, it is ever more valuable the more we grasp the word that the Church wants to say to us at a particular moment in the year. If it is true that we can be struck in front of a phrase or some other text of the liturgy, we should be attentive not to reduce the richness of this meditation to a selection of phrases. This is not the center of the problem. We must educate ourselves not to meditate in that way on the liturgy because we would commit an error. Or, more than an error, a diminishing—a reduction—of the attitude and the value of the presence of God. This reduction has happened often: the Bible, which is the story of the mystery of God in the world, was treated as the source of beautiful, just, and profound phrases, but this leaves to the side the context, the true word of God. In this way, we reduce the Bible to a support for our moral ideals. Instead of understanding the discourse of God as the new language that shatters our human wisdom, we have taken the word of God as a support for our wisdom, or even treated the Bible in an accommodating sense, that is, when a phrase is not interpreted according to our ear—to the ear of our mentality, of our culture—instead of searching to make our mentality, our culture, adequate to the meaning, to the communication, to the witness that sprang from this phrase.

We must approach individual phrases of the liturgy as resonances (words and phrases that resonate in different ways) of a unique word. We must not look at the words in isolation but harmonize them with the life of Christ in the Church. The liturgy is an unending conversation and it is carried along by the power of grace, by the mystery of God in the world.

The lived liturgy constitutes, very simply, the path of our morality. By morality, we mean the right attitude, the right behavior, “right” in front of destiny, the right attitude on the path of destiny.

The liturgy is the synthetic and simple enunciation of this path.

In fact, Christian morality is nothing other than the conversion of our heart, the turning of our heart in the exact direction,

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the direction which indicates the new “heart”: a new perception and judgment, feeling, decision, and action.

This morality, understood as conversion, is defined by two great categories.

The first is the category of listening. The liturgy is a book for the poor of spirit, for those who do not invent their own words. The faithful Christian people follow, repeat, and respond to the liturgical word. Therefore, the liturgy is the place of obedience. There is no path of conversion that does not include this obedience of the heart.

The liturgy is first of all listening, and, because it is first of all listening, it is the word that initiates conversion. *Lex Domini irreprehensibilis convertens animas* (Psalm 118:8). The word of the Lord is irreproachable; it is precise and changes the soul. The word of the Lord in history is the liturgy.

Because the beginning of conversion is listening, the liturgy is the place where we await the coming of the Lord. In fact, when a person prays or reads, eats or works, what is he really doing, if he is a Christian, if his heart has been converted? He is just awaiting the coming of the Lord. In the measure the Christian lives this awaiting, he changes everything that he has in his hands. And so, the Lord’s coming has already begun for him.

The first factor of Christian morality, therefore, is listening and awaiting the Lord’s coming, which is in its depth the attitude of the poor in spirit. If one has nothing else, one listens. If one has nothing else, one waits, and so one hopes to become different.

The second factor of Christian morality is the totality of commitment to the grace of the mystery of God. We live our whole life within this “grace” that reaches us with the liturgical life of the Church and its sacraments.

On the one hand, in fact, the liturgy has the sacraments as its center: the final words of the conversation, the events in which the divine action is realized, the presence of the community as mystery; and on the other hand, the particular liturgy clarifies the meaning of the sacraments: Confession and Eucharist in the Christmas season, for example, have a particular significance different from

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those sacraments in the Easter season. In each moment, though, all the shades of meaning are present together.

Now, if we do not include everything in this grace, we divide Christ and the world, almost as if we made Christ a presence in the world over whom we had rights.

Instead, the conversion of the heart which happens to the poor of spirit generates the unity of the person. Outside of this, whatever energy we think we have, whatever personality we feel ourselves to possess, we will be divided. Divided: Christ/world, community/world, person and activity in the world.

This conversion of heart, the event of those who are poor in spirit, which generates unity in the person, has only one channel: the liturgy. One riverbed into which, in the measure it is lived, all the water of our life is poured: eating and drinking, speaking and praying, working. And so, wherever we are, the dawn of the new world, His coming, begins to break.

PART I

**The Mass**



THE MOST IMPORTANT GESTURE in the entire history of the world is the death and resurrection of Christ. In our life, this gesture is the sacrifice of the Mass. It should be at the center of our day, its most important, privileged moment. It should have an influence on our day. (We must remember that, in order for a gesture to influence life, it should cost something; to cost means work, engagement of our energies, and attention. A gesture that does not cost something is not true.)

The Mass is, then, the most important gesture of our existence because it is the gesture of the death and resurrection of Christ. If in fact we say that we are part of the body of Christ, members of each other, the Mass is the supreme expression of the Christian assembly, of that permanent assembly which is the Christian life. The Mass is the supreme gesture of the community, of the hidden mystery of Christ and of His Church: "Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior!" (Isaiah 45:15).<sup>1</sup>

Faith is a new judgment on reality, on "what makes life worth living." Everything derives from the response we give to this question. One such response is referred to in the Scripture when it says: "The just one will live by faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). Faith is a judgment about the value of life and of the world that has its source in the gesture of Christ's death and resurrection, which we remember. In this gesture, communion with Him, with the Father and with the Spirit, is revived, is reborn continually.

All this is expressed in the Mass with real force. And in fact, all of the Christian life should be a lived Mass; the Mass should be the paradigm, the ideal, inspirational structure, the form of all our actions. We are called to bring to life the mystery of the Christian assembly in which we remember the death and resurrection of Christ. All our gestures, therefore, excluding none, are implied in the Mass. Saint Paul expresses it well when he says: "So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory

of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31); or in this beautiful passage from the Letter to the Romans: “None of us lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself. For if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord; so then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s” (14:7-8).

All of our gestures, however small, have the structure of the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ, that is, the structure of the Mass.

All of our gestures should find in the mystery of the Christian assembly, in which we remember the death and resurrection of Christ, the paradigm, the intelligence, the inspiration, the impetus, the correction of everything, the capacity to understand everything, because everything has a meaning.

So, even just briefly, we must formulate the consequences of the Mass for our personal life.

A great American philosopher of the last century, Alfred North Whitehead, said: “Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness.”<sup>2</sup> We must remember, though, that word religion has the Latin root of binding and indicates a phenomenon that binds together, that connects all of reality, because it binds us to God and to everything. The “I” is linked to God, a relationship with God. So God is everything, not just as a way of speaking, but because it is true. It is true.

God is everything “of you,” “in you.”

For this reason, the topics that we will touch on summarily are meant to be an invitation to participate in the Mass as a contribution to our personal conversion.

There is no other scheme for this change in our personality than that of the sacramental gesture.

The Mass is a unifying gesture, but it is constituted by different parts that bring to life the various factors of a unique reality.

By following intelligently the parts of the Mass, we will be able to comprehend the characteristics of every action of our lives—which should be the characteristics of every relationship, of every day, of every project.



## THE MASS

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*

THE MASS STARTS IN this way. And soon after we say: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” Or that which is the same: “The Lord be with you.”

This is the premise of faith, a judgment on life by which we recognize that the meaning of my existence, of your existence, of everybody’s existence, of the whole history of the world, is named Jesus Christ. It is the mystery of the Trinity, the mystery of God who is one and three, of God who is communion. It is the mystery of this God who revealed Himself by coming among us.

The Bible says at a certain point: before you pray, prepare your conscience so that you don’t seem like a man who tempts God.<sup>3</sup>

The introductory phrases of the Mass recall the consciousness of what we are, of the value of the flesh, the bones, and the spirit of each, the value of woman and of man, of friendship, of errors, of difficulties and evil. They recall the substance of everything.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light.

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man’s decision but of God. And the Word became flesh and made his

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dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.

John testified to him and cried out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.'" From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace, because while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him. (John 1:1-18)

I say this so that no one may deceive you by specious arguments. For even if I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing as I observe your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. So, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted in him and built upon him and established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one captivate you with an empty, seductive philosophy according to human tradition, according to the elemental powers of the world and not according to Christ. For in him dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily, and you share in this fullness in him, who is the head of every Principality and Power. In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not administered by hand, by stripping off the carnal body, with the circumcision of Christ. You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

And even when you were dead [in] transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he brought you to life along with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions; obliterating the bond against us, with its legal claims, which was opposed to us, he also removed it from our midst, nailing it to the cross; despoiling the principalities and the powers, he made a public spectacle of them, leading them away in triumph by it. Let no one, then, pass judgment on you in matters of food and drink or with regard to a festival or new moon or sabbath. These are shadows of things to come; the reality belongs to Christ.

## THE MASS

Let no one disqualify you, delighting in self-abasement and worship of angels, taking his stand on visions, inflated without reason by his fleshly mind, and not holding closely to the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and bonds, achieves the growth that comes from God. If you died with Christ to the elemental powers of the world, why do you submit to regulations as if you were still living in the world? “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!” These are all things destined to perish with use; they accord with human precepts and teachings. While they have a semblance of wisdom in rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, they are of no value against gratification of the flesh. (Colossians 2:4-23)

The awareness of all this should be the premise of all our actions, of all our decisions, great or small.

The passage from Saint John that was cited announces that Christ is the substance of everything. If we stop believing it, it does not cease to be true. In Him everything has consistence. This is our faith, this is the faith of the Church that we glory in professing.<sup>4</sup>

This must become like a “habit,” or better a *habitus*—that is, a permanent attitude—which in philosophical terms is called virtue. Virtue, in fact, is a permanent form of the correct energy. In a converted life, virtue is the awareness of the presence of Christ, the memory of Christ who is present. This awareness of the presence of Christ in everything and in everyone is the content of our vigilance, which means that this awareness accompanies us in every action. It is true change. Love, friendship, work, everything is a sad lie if in these things we do not take note of the mystery of the reign of the God who has knocked at our door. In that case, change does not happen, the conversion of mentality. “He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him” (John 1:11).

## LIVING THE LITURGY

### *In the Name of the Father*

IN HEBREW, “NAME” INDICATED the power of a person. Therefore, “in the name of” means to recognize that all things are sustained by the power of God, that everything is God.

Here, the premise of every action is vigilance: we call it continual prayer. To live vigilantly is to live with intelligence, to live with our full personality.

But do we see this continual prayer in ourselves? Do we have a facility with this type of vision, with this memory, this gaze on the death and resurrection of Christ, of that historic Christ who is present even if we don't think of him? The *habitus*—habituating ourselves to this, the *desire* to habituate ourselves to this—makes it more easily achievable.

The judgment of value on my life and on the world is Christ dead and risen. He did not live two thousand years ago and that's it. Everything that's happened since is investing history, not according to fleshly forms—as Saint Paul says (2 Corinthians 5)—but according to a presence that is moving the world to its destiny through our existences. “It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you” (John 15:16).

*Brothers and sisters, let us acknowledge our sins, and so  
prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries.*

THE FIRST FUNDAMENTAL FACTOR of a converted action, of a Christian action, is the awareness of our own sin. No authentic moment of our existence can avoid this self-accusation, with the exception of Our Lady. She had the awareness of a transparency, the awareness of the fact that everything had been given to her. “My soul magnifies the Lord because he has done great things for me” (Luke 1:46-48).

But for us this “magnifying the Lord” means first of all recognizing that God makes us walk, makes us part of His Church, despite the fact that we are liars. Sin, in fact, is a lie: the affirmation

that the meaning of life, what makes life worth living, is something other than Christ.

Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth, for the Lord speaks: Sons have I raised and reared, but they have rebelled against me! An ox knows its owner, and an ass, its master's manger, but Israel does not know, my people has not understood.

Ah! Sinful nation, people laden with wickedness, evil offspring, corrupt children!

They have forsaken the Lord, spurned the Holy One of Israel, apostatized. Why would you yet be struck, that you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot to the head there is no sound spot in it, just bruise and welt and oozing wound, not drained, or bandaged, or eased with salve.

Your country is waste, your cities burnt with fire; your land—before your eyes strangers devour it, a waste, like the devastation of Sodom and Gomorrah.

And daughter Zion is left like a hut in a vineyard, like a shed in a melon patch, like a city blockaded.

If the Lord of hosts had not left us a small remnant, we would have become as Sodom, would have resembled Gomorrah.

Hear the word of the Lord, princes of Sodom! Listen to the instruction of our God, people of Gomorrah!

What do I care for the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord. I have had enough of whole-burnt rams and fat of fatlings; in the blood of calves, lambs, and goats I find no pleasure.

When you come to appear before me, who asks these things of you? Trample my courts no more! To bring offerings is useless; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath, calling assemblies—festive convocations with wickedness—these I cannot bear. Your new moons and festivals I detest; they weigh me down, I tire of the load. When you spread out your hands, I will close my eyes to you; though you pray the more, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood!

Wash yourselves clean! Put away your misdeeds from before my eyes; cease doing evil; learn to do good. Make

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justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow. Come now, let us set things right, says the Lord: Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they may become white as wool. If you are willing, and obey, you shall eat the good things of the land; but if you refuse and resist, you shall be eaten by the sword: for the mouth of the Lord has spoken! (Isaiah 1:2-20)

Thus says the Lord through Isaiah, and these observations of the Bible are categories that have value for our life.

There is nothing healthier than the realistic awareness of the condition in which we must carry out an action. There is no healthier gesture, at the origin of every action, than the awareness that we are sinners. At least, at the minimum, we should recognize that even our simplest actions lack the awareness of vigilance, the intensity of faith. We render poor things that should be full of richness.

And we usually sin in two ways; these are the roots of our disproportion.

First, *the reluctance to commit our lives: saying "no" to faith.*

Now someone approached him and said, "Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?" He answered him, "Why do you ask me about the good? There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." He asked him, "Which ones?" And Jesus replied, "*You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother; and 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*" The young man said to him, "All of these I have observed. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Amen, I say to you, it will be hard for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to pass through

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the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (Matthew 19:16-24)

Even if we have faith, we flee from faith, because faith is a commitment that mobilizes us, that transforms us, that pushes us to change.

The second source of our sins is that *we do not hope for the solution of our individual and collective problems from faithfulness to Christ*, and therefore we do not expect joy from Him. We see it also in the history of the people of Israel, which God gave as a paradigm of the life of the people of God, of our life.

Therefore, thus says the Holy One of Israel: Because you reject this word, and put your trust in oppression and deceit, and depend on them, this iniquity of yours shall be like a descending rift bulging out in a high wall whose crash comes suddenly, in an instant, crashing like a potter’s jar smashed beyond rescue, and among its fragments cannot be found a sherd to scoop fire from the hearth or dip water from the cistern. For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: “By waiting and by calm you shall be saved, in quiet and in trust shall be your strength.” But this you did not will. “No,” you said, “Upon horses we will flee.” Very well, you shall flee! “Upon swift steeds we will ride.” Very well, swift shall be your pursuers! A thousand shall tremble at the threat of one—if five threaten, you shall flee. You will then be left like a flagstaff on a mountaintop, like a flag on a hill. (Isaiah 30:12-17)

Woe to [those who] go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses; who put their trust in chariots because of their number, and in horsemen because of their combined power, but look not to the Holy One of Israel nor seek the Lord! Yet he too is wise and will bring disaster; he will not turn from his threats. He will rise up against the house of the wicked and against those who help evil-doers. The Egyptians are human beings, not God, their horses flesh, not spirit. (Isaiah 31:1-3)

In these passages from the Bible, chosen as examples, God asks His people not to put their faith in anyone but Him. Have we not said that faith is a judgment of value on the world? And the judgment is that Christ is everything in everyone and without Him nothing can be done. All things have their consistence in Him: the rocks, the stars, and man, society, the past and the future. “This is our faith, the faith of the Church which we glory in professing” (Rite of Baptism).

So then, the second root of every sin of ours: even we trust ourselves to “Egypt”—the biblical symbol of the enemy of God—and not to the Lord, the true God.

### *The Word of God*

THE WORD OF GOD helps us understand the disproportion between us and the ideal of Christ but also connects us to this ideal.

In fact, in the Mass, after the gesture of contrition, we pass to the proclamation of the word of God with the passage from the Old Testament, the Epistle, the Gospel.

We do not understand the passages we read during the Mass if listening to these words does not produce in us the awareness that we are sinners. Only through this real contrition is it possible to participate in the gesture of the community that is happening in that moment. In this way, we can hear the deep call of the word of God—the call of faith.

We should realize that too frequently this call, these words, are heard with a great detachment.

But what does it mean to live the faith? To live the faith is not something different from living life. It means to live life with the instinct, the intelligence, the heart, and the will of faith.

We can no longer say to ourselves: “Okay. We are Christians: but in the problems of life and of society what should we do?” This kind of question highlights how our personality has been broken in two, almost as if the judgment about life, about society, about culture were outside of the horizon of faith. Nothing is outside the confines of the experience of faith because its boundaries are the



boundaries of life. “The just one will live by faith” (Habakkuk 2:4; Hebrews 10:38), says the Lord.

A faith that has the fact of Christ as its content, that is, the event of the one in whom all things consist, is characterized by this integrity—well beyond integralism—for which all of life is handed over to God, by which we adhere to an announcement that says: nothing of you is yours.

To live the faith means that it informs everything, as a conception, as a feeling, as a project, as a decision, as a way of facing things. Saint Paul says, when he writes to the Philippians: “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (4:8). There are not good things and bad things for us Christians; there is, rather, a way of facing things with faith or without faith. This is how good and evil are established, the evil that wears out, destroys, and corrupts reality. We are very good at casting blame when instead we should understand that our infidelity creates hardship and corruption. If then the word of God illumines our life, accompanying it with the awareness of our disproportion, the pain we always see in our actions is a healthy pain, is constructive, is a pain that does not block us, that pushes us to be better—what Saint Paul calls “godly sadness” (2 Corinthians 7:9-10). “Evil sadness,” instead, is the pain that interrupts the construction, the melancholy that becomes lament. “Godly sadness” has the same point of departure, notes the disproportion, but does not stop there: it generates a pain that turns us around, that converts us. The awareness of our sin changes us, fills us with the desire to change our life.

The word of God converts life, changes the meaning of life, always, every day. This inexhaustible vitality which the word of God raises up in us is the truth that remains for eternity.