



Allocutio



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Allocutio: Active participation in the Mass

I have picked up some material produced by the Office for the Eucharistic Congress and it has its merits. But I still think that we await the leaflet that will do justice to what the Mass is and also communicate it.

Cardinal Ratzinger in his work *The Spirit of the Liturgy* speaks of active participation. He rightly points out that active participation cannot just be about saying the responses at Mass or doing certain gestures. The active participation must come above all from our deep inner spirits, our hearts. He does speak of proper gestures in the same work such as kneeling, prostrating etc. But for him the most important thing is our inner dispositions.

And in his recent Apostolic Letter *Sacramentum Caritatis* following the Synod on the Eucharist he, now Pope Benedict XVI, writes, "It should be made clear that the word participation does not refer to mere external activity during the celebration. In fact the active participation ... must be understood in more substantial terms, on the basis of a greater awareness of the mystery being celebrated and its relationship to daily life". He goes on to say that the Council called on the faithful to take part "in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, actively, and devoutly". And speaking obviously of the Mass he says "They should give thanks to God. Offering the immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him, they should learn to make an offering of themselves."

I was meditating on the miracle of the loaves and the fishes recently. And I noted a certain likeness to what happened on the road to Emmaus. In both of them Christ first broke the word of God. Then after that he broke the bread with them. The miracle of the loaves and the fishes prefigured the Eucharist; the event on the road to Emmaus was in effect the first mass of the post-Resurrection era and it was fitting that Christ himself was there celebrating it in his Risen form. For it is he who is at every Eucharist, explaining the Word of God to us and sharing himself with us in the breaking of bread.

However in the miracle of the loaves and fishes something happened which tells us how to partake in the event. You remember how the day got long and the disciples had had their day off messed up by the people. So they were just about cheesed off. "Let's get rid of this shower and send them into the local villages." But Jesus says, "You give them something to eat". And they reply, "We only have two fish and five small loaves." And then look at what Jesus did with their small offering.



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This tells us something of that active participation in the liturgy the Pope speaks of. Jesus is saying to us at Mass, “You offer something! Offer the day, your energies, your heart, your sufferings to God and place them on the altar with me. And although you may be weak and your offering look negligible, even if you have only one talent, offer it with me. Offer the work you will do, offer the prayers you will say for others, offer your efforts to be charitable, forgiving, encouraging, persevering, enduring, offer yourself as a light to others and entrust it to God. Your offering may seem so small, full of holes, inadequate, you may be alert to your failures and weaknesses that put in doubt your capacity to deliver but hand it to God. And just as the mustard seed is so small yet grows into the biggest shrub, or just as the small yeast looks nothing but leavens the bread, Jesus will take your poor offering and bless it and give it a quality in the eyes of God the Father.

It will help us greatly if we can dispose our hearts properly when we come to Mass. That inner participation cannot happen if we do not first acknowledge God. We owe him everything we have so we offer him all we have with Christ. But we must come contrite because we have sinned and in the case of grave sin we should come having confessed it and had it forgiven in Confession. In other words let us come with a clear conscience.

We need to come too and see with who we are making the offering. We are uniting our offering with that of Christ the Lamb of God. If he acted with such nobility and kindness in bowing to the awful death we gave him we cannot come superficially or carelessly. Surely his sheer goodness requires in our hearts deep sorrow for what we did on him. And so our offering must be also a way of saying to him, “Jesus, your death was not in vain. You have won me. Here I am at your side. I know it is nothing compared to what you did but still I offer it.”

Let me go back a moment to the road to Emmaus. It is interesting that in the Liturgy of the Word on that occasion Christ used texts which pointed to his suffering and death, “Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory!” The Liturgy of the Word always points to the next part of the Mass, the Liturgy in which we celebrate both the passion and death and indeed the Resurrection of Christ.

And this leads me finally to the last point about active participation. We too must offer with Christ our suffering in any form and with him say, “Not my will but thine be done.” St Teresa of Avila records that when her father was dying he spoke of a great pain in his back. The saint reminded him of his devotion to the carrying of the Cross over the years and that now he had been given a real share in it. The man never complained again



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and died peacefully. So maybe we can also offer our final agony and death. My whole life Lord is yours. All I will have to face including my final suffering and death. I commend it to you God trusting with and like Jesus.

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill