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Addresses

## Glorify God by your life: evangelization and the renewal of the liturgy

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I'm very honored to be here tonight. This annual lecture reminds us that the Church in Chicago has played an historic role not only in the renewal of the liturgy, but also in the evangelization of America.

The vision of Cardinal Mundelein and Cardinal Stritch, along with the pioneering efforts of priests like Msgr. Hillenbrand and lay apostolates like the Catholic Family Movement, bore lasting fruit. They gave the Church an infusion of apostolic energy that nearly a century later still informs our worship and our Catholic witness in this culture.

So I'm happy to pay tribute to that. But the fact that this Institute is celebrating its 10th anniversary also reminds us that the Chicago legacy is being carried on with zeal and intelligence under the leadership of my friend, Cardinal Francis George.

I'm a member of the bishops's Committee on Divine Worship and I've been honored to work with Cardinal George on the next major development in the liturgical renewal—the English translation of the new edition of the Roman Missal, which we begin implementing in the United States sometime next year.

But I'm not here to talk about the new Missal tonight. I've been asked to speak on the broader questions of evangelization and the renewal of the liturgy, and I will. I do need to mention one caveat, though: The thoughts I offer you tonight are mine alone. I don't speak for any of my brother bishops, or for the bishops' conference; and I'm very happy to defer to Cardinal George's judgment in all matters Catholic.

I want to start our conversation in an unlikely place. The scene is Mainz, Germany, April 1964. Just a few months earlier, in December 1963, Vatican II had published its groundbreaking document on the liturgy. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* was rightly hailed as the distillation of the practical and theological genius of the liturgical movement.

These were heady days, and the group gathering in Mainz for the Third German Liturgical Conference was understandably in a self-congratulatory mood. One of their friends, a pioneering theologian in the continental liturgical movement, could not join them. That friend was Father Romano Guardini, author of the now classic work, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*.

Though he couldn't be there, Guardini sent a long open letter that was read to the conference. In it, he praised the work of Vatican II as a testimony that the Holy Spirit was alive and guiding the Church. He saw *Sacrosanctum Concilium* opening a new phase in the liturgical movement.

But the bulk of his letter was a complex meditation on the meaning of worship. And in his final lines he offered an opinion that left people stunned. He wrote:

"Is not the liturgical act, and with it all that goes under the name 'liturgy,' so bound up with the historical background—antique or medieval or baroque—that it would be more honest to give it up altogether? Would it not be better to admit that man in this industrial and scientific age, with its new sociological structure, is no longer capable of the liturgical act?"<sup>i</sup>

Guardini's remark caused quite a stir. But there's no evidence that theologians or liturgists ever took his concerns seriously. Let me say that I do. I think he put his finger on one of the key questions of mission in his time, and also in ours.

What Guardini meant by the liturgical act was the transformation of personal prayer and piety into genuine corporate worship, the *leitourgia*, the public service that the Church offers to God. He recognized that the Church's corporate prayer was very different from the private prayer of individual believers.

The liturgical act requires a new kind of consciousness, a "readiness toward God," an inward awareness of the unity of the whole person, body and soul, with the *spiritual* body of the Church, present in heaven and on earth. It also requires an appreciation that the sacred signs and actions of the Mass -- standing, kneeling, singing and so forth -- are themselves "prayer."

Guardini believed that the spirit of the modern world was undermining the beliefs that made this liturgical consciousness possible. His insight here is that our faith and worship don't take place in a vacuum. We're always to some extent products of our culture. Our frameworks of meaning, our perceptions of reality, are shaped by the culture in which we live -- whether we like it or not.

I want to engage Guardini's challenge in our current American context. Let's consider some of the evidence: We live in a society where the organizing principle is technological progress, conceived in narrow, scientific and materialistic terms. Our culture is dominated by the assumptions of this scientific and materialistic worldview. We judge what is "true" and what is "real" by what we can see, touch and verify through research and experimentation.

In this kind of culture, what meaning can there be for the traditional Catholic notion that the human person is created in the image of an invisible God; that the person is a creature of body and soul, infused with "the Spirit of sonship"<sup>ii</sup> through the liturgy and the sacraments?

In practice, almost nothing of what we believe as Catholics is affirmed by our culture. Even the meaning of the words "human" and "person" are subject to debate. And other tenets of the Catholic worldview are aggressively repudiated or ignored.

The question becomes: What implications does all this have for our worship -- in which we profess to be in contact body and soul with spiritual realities, singing with the angels and saints in heaven, receiving the true Body and Blood of our once dead and now risen Lord on the altar?

Here's another datum: We're surrounded in our daily lives by monuments to our power over nature and necessity. The trophies of our autonomy and self-sufficiency are everywhere -- buildings, machines, medicines, inventions. Everything seems to point to our capacity to provide for our every need through our own know-how and technology.

Again the question becomes: What does this do to the central premise of our worship -- that we are creatures dependent upon our Creator, and that we owe thanksgiving to God for every good gift, beginning with the gift of life?

We can ask the same questions about our mission of evangelization. We preach the good news that this world has a Savior who can free us from the bondage of sin and death. What can our good news mean in a world where people don't believe in sin or that there is anything they need to be saved *from*? What does the promise of victory over death mean to people who don't believe in the existence of any reality beyond this visible world?

So is Guardini right? Does modern man seem incapable of real worship? I think so. But the more important question for us is this: If he *is* right, what are we going to do about it?

One of the few people who have wrestled with the issues Guardini raised is a Chicago priest who's made his own important contributions to the liturgical and intellectual renewal of the Church, Father Robert Barron.

Barron puts the issue this way: "The project is not shaping the liturgy according to the suppositions of the age, but allowing the liturgy to question and shape the suppositions of any age. Is the modern man incapable of the liturgical act? Probably. But this is no ground for despair. Our goal is not to accommodate the liturgy to the world, but to let the liturgy be itself -- a transformative icon of the

*ordo* of God.”<sup>iii</sup>

Barron suggests that in the post-conciliar era, the professional Catholic liturgical establishment opted for the former path, trying to adapt the liturgy to the demands of modern culture. I would agree. And I would add that time has shown this to be a dead end. Trying to engineer the liturgy to be more “relevant” and “intelligible” through a kind of relentless cult of novelty, has only resulted in confusion and a deepening of the divide between believers and the true spirit of the liturgy.

I’m not here to reargue old debates. We need to be looking forward to Jesus Christ. That means we need to take up the challenge implied in Guardini’s question. The next great task of the liturgical renewal is to build an authentic Eucharistic culture, to instill a new sacramental and liturgical sensibility that enables Catholics to face the idols and suppositions of our culture with the confidence of believers who draw life from the sacred mysteries, in which we have communion with the living God.

We need to discover new ways to enter into the liturgical mystery; to realize the central place of the liturgy in God’s plan of salvation; to truly live our lives as a spiritual offering to God; and to embrace our responsibilities for the Church’s mission with a renewed Eucharistic spirituality.

I hope the rest of my talk will offer a small contribution to this next task of our renewal. I have four points I’d like to make.

The first is this: *We need to recover the intrinsic and inseparable connection between liturgy and evangelization.*

Liturgy is both the *source* of the Church’s mission and its *goal*. This was the teaching of Christ and the practice of the early Church. And it was reaffirmed by Vatican II.

*Sacrosanctum Concilium* says this: “The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows. For the aim and object of apostolic works is that all who are made sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of his Church, to take part in the sacrifice, and to eat the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>iv</sup>

This is a beautiful vision of life lived *from* the Eucharist and *for* the Eucharist. This should be the foundation not only for our thinking about the liturgy but for our pastoral strategies as well. The reason we evangelize is in order to bring people into communion with the living God in the Eucharistic liturgy. And this experience of communion with God, in turn, impels us to evangelize.

In this regard, the *Novus Ordo*, the new order of the Mass promulgated after the council, has been a great blessing to the Church. Our liturgy gives us the zeal for the evangelization and sanctification of our world. The vernacular has opened up the liturgy’s content in new ways. It has encouraged active, creative participation by all the faithful -- not only in the liturgy but in every aspect of the Church’s mission.

By the way, for the record, I’m also very grateful that the Holy Father has allowed wider use of the older Tridentine form -- not because I personally prefer it, in fact I find the *Novus Ordo*, properly celebrated, a much richer expression of worship; but because we need access to all of the Church’s heritage of prayer and faith.

So my first point is that we cannot look at the liturgy as something distinct from our mission. Our worship of God in the Mass is meant to be an act of adoration, submission and thanksgiving. It’s also meant to be loving acceptance of our vocation as disciples. That’s why every Eucharistic liturgy ends on a missionary note -- we are sent out, commissioned to share the treasure we have discovered with everyone we meet.

Here’s my second point: *The liturgy is a participation in the liturgy of heaven, in which we worship in Spirit and truth with the worldwide Church and the communion of saints.*

This may be the most neglected dimension of the liturgy today.<sup>v</sup> If our liturgies strike us as pedestrian, narrowly parochial, too focused on our own communities and needs; if they lack a powerful sense of the sacred and the transcendent, it’s because we have lost the sense of how our worship participates in the heavenly liturgy.

To appreciate this a little more, we should recall the legend of how Christianity came to Russia. The story goes that around 988, Prince Vladimir I of Kiev was searching for a national religion. He sent ambassadors to neighboring countries to seek out the respective virtues of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. During the course of their fact-finding journey the prince's men had occasion to attend a Eucharistic celebration in the great Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.

They were overcome with awe. They went back home and filed this report: "We came to the Greeks, and we were taken to the place where they worship their God. ... We do not know whether we have been in heaven or on earth. ... We know only that God dwells there among men."<sup>vi</sup> Not long after that, Vladimir was baptized and exhorted all his countrymen to be baptized too.

The source for this story is ancient, and many historians today believe the account is apocryphal. But even so, it illuminates the cosmic and missionary dimensions of the liturgy.

The Eucharist, as the Prince of Kiev's men were said to have experienced it, is a cosmic liturgy that unites the worship of heaven with our worship here on earth. In the Divine Liturgy, the Kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven. Heaven and earth are filled with the glory of God. This is what we believe, but I'm not sure how many believers actually *live* it.

We see the heavenly liturgy in the Book of Revelation. Remember how Revelation begins. St. John is "in the Spirit on the Lord's Day." In other words, he was celebrating the Eucharist on a Sunday when he was given a vision of the worship of heaven and the world to come.<sup>vii</sup>

The book is filled with liturgical and sacramental imagery. At one point John sees an uncountable multitude from every tribe, tongue, people and nation worshipping before the Eucharistic Lamb. The climax of the book is the coming of "a new heaven and a new earth" and the announcement: "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men."

There are two points I want to make here: First, our worship is an icon of heavenly things, a window through which the reality and destiny of our lives is glimpsed.

Second, the heavenly liturgy is the key to the universality of the Church's mission. In the Catholic vision of history, God's plan of salvation is destined to culminate in a cosmic liturgy in which all creation gives praise and glory to God, the Creator of all things. We have a foretaste of the liturgical consummation of history every time we celebrate the liturgy on earth.

This truth should transform the way we worship. It should move us with gratitude that our God would grant us the privilege of joining the angels and saints who worship before him. It should make us strive for liturgies that are reverent and beautiful, and that point our hearts and minds to things above.

This truth should also change the way we think about our public witness in this culture. We're called to testify to Jesus Christ, to make his teachings known, to fight against all that violates God's holiness and justice. And we need to understand our mission in the light of God's larger plan, conceived before the foundation of the world.

The ultimate purpose of our witness is to prepare the way for the cosmic liturgy in which all humanity will adore the Creator. Our work takes part in this redemptive plan in which Christ continues to reconcile all things, until that day when every knee in heaven and on earth shall bend in worship, and God is "all in all," as St. Paul put it.<sup>viii</sup>

Here's my third point: *We need to strive to recover and live with the same vibrant liturgical and evangelical spirituality as the early Christians.*

Some of the worst liturgical ideas since the council have been based on a woolly romanticizing about what the early Christians believed and how they worshipped. It has been argued, for example, that the early Church had no sacramental priesthood and that the Eucharist was celebrated with limited ritual, essentially as a meal shared among friends.

I won't take the time here to rebut these claims. The problem with all such nostalgic-primitivist reconstructions can be summed up in one thought: Nobody risks torture and death for a meal with their friends. And torture and death were the frequent penalty for being caught celebrating the

Eucharist in the world of the early Church.

There are countless stories we could point to. One that especially moves me comes from the year 304, during Diocletian's great persecution. A congregation in Abitina, a village near Carthage, was rounded up. The account of their torture, written by a witness just a few years after the fact, is brutally raw and graphic. What shines out is the people's Eucharistic faith.

Interrogated about why he disobeyed the Emperor's decree, a young lector named Felix said this: "As if one could be a Christian without the Mass or the Mass could be celebrated without a Christian! ... The Christian exists through the Mass and the Mass in Christians! Neither can exist without the other. ... We celebrated the glorious assembly. We gathered to read the Scriptures of the Lord at the Mass."<sup>ix</sup>

We notice in this confession the same themes we've been talking about. The Mass for these disciples is no mere meal. It's a "glorious assembly," a heavenly liturgy. This liturgy defines their identity as Christians. And it also defines the identity of the Church; so much so that one of Felix's fellow martyrs would confess: "We cannot live without the Mass."

This is the kind of faith that should inspire our worship. And this is the kind of faith that *our worship should inspire*. Can we really say today that we're ready to die rather than not celebrate the Mass?

The liturgy can only inspire us if we make it the heart of our days. And that's a task for us in this room. The centerpiece of a new Eucharistic culture has to be the Sunday celebration of the Mass. There is no greater sign of our culture's impact on the Eucharist than the fact that we no longer see Sunday as the first day of the week but as the final day of our "weekend."

Jesus Christ rose from the dead on "the first day of the week."<sup>x</sup> That's why the first Christians hal-  
lowed Sunday as the "weekly Easter," the Day of the Lord. That's why we should too.

The Mass should be the spiritual offering we make to begin each week, not something we try to "fit in" among our leisure activities before we have to return to work on Monday. Even this subtle change in outlook could have a deep impact on the way we worship and the way we live our faith in the world.

My fourth and final point is this: *The liturgy is a school of sacrificial love*. The law of our prayer should be the law of our life. *Lex orandi, lex vivendi*. We are to become the sacrifice we celebrate.

It is striking how many stories of the first Christian martyrs -- especially the stories of bishops and priests -- are told in what we might call a "Eucharistic key." The classic is the martyrdom of the elderly bishop Polycarp. The whole account unfolds along the lines of a liturgy. Polycarp even delivers a long prayer that is modeled after the Eucharistic canon of the Mass.

Finally Polycarp asks, again echoing the prayer of the Mass: "May I be received this day ... as a rich and acceptable sacrifice." The account continues with his being roasted alive. The witnesses testify that they smell, not burning flesh, but the aroma of breaking bread.<sup>xi</sup>

The other classic example is St. Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch. In prison where he was awaiting his execution by being fed alive to dogs, he wrote: "God's wheat I am, and by the teeth of wild beasts I am to be ground that I may prove to be Christ's pure bread."<sup>xii</sup>

But not only the martyrs should see themselves as a Eucharistic offering. You and I should do the same. So should every baptized believer. Again and again we read in the New Testament that we are *all* called to offer ourselves to God as a living sacrifice of praise, that we are to make ourselves a perfect offering, holy and acceptable to God.

This is a foundation stone to the Catholic belief in the priesthood of all the baptized. The early Christians believed they were heirs to the vocation given to Israel—to be a "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation."<sup>xiv</sup> By the priesthood of our lives, all baptized believers are to offer, not the blood-sacrifice of animals, but the sacrifice of our hearts, the symbol of our lives, in imitation of Jesus Christ.

We make our sacrifice of praise first and foremost in the Eucharist. This is the meaning behind the

council's call for the "active participation" of the laity in the liturgy.<sup>xv</sup> This expression unfortunately has been taken as a license for all sorts of external activity, commotion and busy-ness in our worship. That's not at all what Vatican II had in mind.

"Active participation" refers to the inner movement of our souls, our interior participation in Christ's action of offering of his Body and Blood. This requires silent spaces and "pauses" in our worship, in which we can collect our emotions and thoughts, and make a conscious act of self-dedication. We are to "lift up our hearts," and in contrition and humility place them on the altar along with the bread and wine.

But our work does not stop in the Mass.

Everything in our days -- our work, our sufferings, our prayer, our ministries -- everything we do and experience is meant to be offered to God as a spiritual sacrifice. All of our work for the unborn child, the poor and the disabled; all of our work for immigration justice and the dignity of marriage and the family: *All of it* should be offered for the praise and glory of God's name and for the salvation of our brothers and sisters.

This is another great teaching of the council that we have yet to integrate into ordinary Catholic spirituality. In *Lumen Gentium*, the council taught that all our works "together with the offering of the Lord's Body ... are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus, as those everywhere who adore in holy activity, the laity consecrate the world itself to God."

All that we do -- in the liturgy and in our life in the world -- is meant to be in the service of consecrating this world to God.<sup>xvi</sup>

So my friends, we have come full circle.

This is the answer to Guardini's challenge. *You* are the answer to Guardini's challenge. The liturgical act becomes possible for modern man when *you make your lives a liturgy*, when you live your lives liturgically -- as an offering to God in thanksgiving and praise for his gifts and salvation. *You* are the future of the liturgical renewal.

The liturgical act becomes possible for modern man when you see your lives and work in light of God's plan for the world, in light of his desire that all men and women be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.<sup>xvii</sup>

The mystery we celebrate with the angels and the saints must take root deep in our lives and personalities. It must bear fruit. Each of us must make our own unique contribution to God's loving plan -- that all creation become adoration and sacrifice in praise of him.

Thank you for your attention tonight. And it's fitting that we should conclude and go forth in the words of one of the new dismissal prayers of the new Roman Missal. So let our prayer for each other tonight be this: "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life."

#### Endnotes:

i. See the account in Robert Krieg, *Romano Guardini: A Precursor of Vatican II* (Notre Dame, 1997), 87–90. A unofficial translation of Guardini's letter can be found at: <http://www.jknirp.com/guardf.htm>.

ii. cf. Rom. 8:15.

iii. Robert E. Barron, *Bridging the Great Divide: Musings of a Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative Evangelical Catholic* (Rowan & Littlefield, 2004), 66; cf. Chap. 5: "The Liturgical Act and the Church of the 21st Century."

iv. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10.

v. cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 8, *Lumen Gentium* 50; *Catechism*, 1090, 1111, 1136, 1187, 1326,

2642.

vi. *The Rus Primary Chronicle* (Cambridge: Mediaeval Academy, 1953); cf. Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith* (Ignatius, 2005), 90–91.

vii. Rev. 1:9.

viii. 2 Pet. 3:13; Eph. 1:10, 23; 1 Cor. 15:28; 2 Cor. 5:19; Col. 1:18, 20 Phil. 2:5–12.

ix. *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 8, col. 696; the Latin *dominico* is sometimes translated “the Lord’s Day” or “Lord’s Supper.” But the form is a kind of slang, suggesting “Mass”; cf. Mike Aquilina, *Fire of God’s Love: 120 Reflections on the Eucharist* (Servant, 2009), 13.

x. Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1.

xi. *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 9, in *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, trans. Herbert Musurillo (Clarendon, 1972).

xii. *To the Romans*, 4.

xiii. cf. Rom. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:5; Heb. 9:14; 13:15, 16.

xiv. cf. 2 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; Exod. 19:4.

xv. cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14 (Latin: *actuosa participatio*).

xvi. *Lumen Gentium*, 34.

xvii. cf. 1 Tim. 2:4.