

Naming the Context: Reflections on Recent Liturgical Directives

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One of the challenges sound-bite technology does not provide is a wider context to understand issues that are offered for public reflection. I think in many ways this circumstance has found its way close to the heart of liturgical renewal in the Catholic Church, most notably in the United States. In the previous issue of the *Catholic Chronicle*, Bishop Blair highlighted some of the foundational aspects that have prompted Pope John Paul and various Vatican offices to set the record straight when it comes to ritual protocol and the deposit of faith expressed in the Church's liturgy.

The issue is not enforcing change for the sake of making life difficult for the people of God, nor is it a matter of change for the sake of change. The recent issuance of liturgical directives is intended to assist us in never taking the Holy Eucharist for granted, as some casual dining experience, or a matter of entitlement. It is first and foremost a gift to and for the Church – the people of God. And while human behavioral patterns associated with dining are integral to our ritual at Mass, there is a clear distinction between the two. Mass is not a casual dining event. It requires our utmost care and reverence.

Most of the comments and questions received in the diocesan Office of Worship regarding the recent directives pertaining to the celebration of Mass revolve around one single question: Why? Why are these directives being implemented? Why are we being asked to change something that has not been broken? Why does the protocol that has promoted the full, conscious and active participation now seem to tighten the reigns?

The answer, I believe, is a matter of attitude. If we believe that all of this is simply a desire to undermine the liturgical renewal of the Second Vatican Council, then we will go nowhere in our understanding. If, however, we place upon our hearts the fact that the Holy Spirit has, in the course of time, moved the Church in mysterious ways, then we may be at an important crossroad in the journey of faith. Perhaps all of the energy to address liturgical practices in our time in history is God's way to lead us to a new realization of the reign of God. That seems to be the pattern throughout the history of the Church. Our context in history is one small segment in the plan of salvation.

In future weeks it will be my intent to offer some thoughts on selected topics pertaining to the revised liturgical directives found in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* and *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, especially those that have raised significant concern in our local parishes.