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Editor's Note: The following is a transcript of prepared remarks delivered by Dr. Peter Kwasniewski at the official launch of Bishop Athanasius Schneider's book, *The Catholic Mass: Steps to Restoring the Centrality of God in the Liturgy* (Sophia Institute Press, 2021), hosted by the publisher in Arlington, VA (Oct. 18, 2022).

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It is truly a great honor and joy to be here this evening, in the company of His Excellency Bishop Athanasius Schneider, my long-time friend Diane Montagna, my newer friend Charlie McKinney, and all the distinguished guests and faithful Catholics who make up the audience. Thank you for coming tonight to learn about Bishop Schneider's critically important book, *The Catholic Mass.* For a book with such a modest and straightforward title, I must say it packs a punch. To my mind, it ought to be required reading for every seminarian, deacon, priest, and religious, as well as any layman with an interest in the sacred liturgy—and that should be all of us.

I'd like to open my remarks with two quotations from Sacred Scripture. "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord with slackness" (Jer. 48:10, ESV), or as some other translations have it, "negligently" (cf. ASV); and, "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Ps. 29:2, KJV).

"Exalt Him as Much as Ye Can"

The first verse, taken from the Prophet Jeremiah, speaks of a terrible danger that faces mortal man in this life: the danger of neglecting the *opus Dei*, the work of divine worship for which we and the entire cosmos have been created and redeemed; the sin of performing it carelessly or fraudulently. In the tradition, "religion" names the virtue by which we give to God what we owe Him — the best we can, in the best manner, according to the Book of Sirach: "When you glorify the Lord, exalt Him as much as ye can; for even yet will He far exceed: and when ye exalt Him, put forth all your strength, and be not weary, for ye can never go far enough" (43:30). As St. Thomas Aquinas teaches, religion is the highest of all moral virtues. Offering right religious worship is the most important task we have, ranking only behind the acts of the theological virtues of faith in God, hope in gaining Heaven by God's help, and charity for God and for those who belong to Him. Jeremiah is warning us against a "cursed cultus," in which either what we are offering or the *manner* in which we

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are offering it is displeasing to Almighty God, and brings upon us not blessing but curse.

The second verse, taken from Psalm 28 (or 29 in the Hebrew enumeration), speaks positively of the blessed obligation we have to "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." The beauty required for worship is first and foremost an internal spiritual beauty, that of holiness, of being in the state of grace; but since we are creatures of soul and body, the beauty of the invisible God and of the invisible soul in which He deigns to dwell are also meant to be reflected outwardly in the beauty of *how* we worship as rational animals — in the beauty of our churches, our liturgical ceremonies, our sacred music, our vestments, vessels, furnishings, paintings, sculptures, and windows. These things can teach us and tell us, wordlessly, that God is the ultimate beauty for which we long; that His beauty is luminous, radiant, ravishing, attractive, comforting, and calming, and yet also demanding, severe, strange, incomprehensible, mysterious. He is the God among us and the God beyond us: Emmanuel, but also the One "dwelling in light inaccessible, Whom no man hath seen nor can see," as St. Paul says to St. Timothy (1 Tim 6:16).

Catholic worship always found ways to express this paradoxical mystery of God's immanence and transcendence, His supreme holiness that is both fearful and fascinating to us, and which calls from us a response of utter seriousness that encompasses our entire being, mind and heart, flesh and psyche, senses, imagination, memory. We offer to Him, moreover, not only what we are individually, not only what we are as a community at a particular time and place, but also what we have been and will be as members of the one Church of Christ stretching from Abel the just until the last breath of the last man to confess Christ before the world ends.

In particular, we owe Him the worship of our forefathers, of our ancestors, our "predecessors," the ones who have run the race before us and reached the kingdom ahead of us, and who are therefore more advanced than we are. The continuity of tradition, in other words, is part of what we offer to God in our worship: it is the combined voice of the departed and the living, the many generations speaking, singing, keeping silence as one social-spiritual entity before the face of God. To worship God with novelties, inventions, fabrications, in a spirit of momentary spontaneity, is to deprive Him of the beauty of united, collective, time-embracing and time-transcending holiness. It is to deprive Him of the best that He has inspired over the ages, the gifts He intended to be given and received among ourselves and under His gaze, for His glory.

Tradition is not the lazy repetition of the past on the part of a present generation lacking in creativity or adaptability; it is not a nostalgic hankering after something we no longer have but wish we did. It is, rather, the attitude of humble receptivity that welcomes, cherishes, and rejoices in the treasury of the Church as the family of God and the people of God, on

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pilgrimage through time, carrying in their arms and hearts all the riches bestowed upon them. It is only the rootless, individualistic, self-sufficient, self-centered, arrogant modern man who cares nothing for his family heritage — for the history, customs, heirlooms, books, memories and stories of past generations who, in fact, remain *alive in God*. It is perfect folly to imagine that the saints of the past are less qualified than we are to determine how divine worship should be conducted. Or, to put it the other way around, it is perfect folly to imagine that *we* are more qualified than the saints of the past to determine how divine worship should be conducted. On the contrary, their cumulative testimony is the model, measure, and motivation for our action and suffering, our divine worship, our discipleship to Christ. This is the Catholic mentality, and it is the exact antithesis of the modern one. Tragically, the contradiction between these two mentalities entered into the bloodstream of the Church on earth with the vaunted *aggiornamento* of the Second Vatican Council and the attempted modernization of the sacred liturgy thereafter.

In truth, we receive what the Greek tradition calls "the divine liturgy" from God through the Church — not the Church of a single day or a single moment, much less the churchmen intoxicated with the zeitgeist, but the Church throughout history — and we hand it down faithfully. Thus did the Israelites, having received their worship from the hand of God, Who revealed the inflexible principles that govern all worship on earth and in Heaven; thus did Israel's Messiah when He said to His Apostles, the first priests of the New Covenant: "Do this *in memory of Me*," that is, imitate Me, follow what I do, and pass it on as a living memory, as a making-present of this one sacrifice. Thus did St. Paul when he told the Corinthians: "I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you" (1 Cor. 11:2), and who told the Thessalonians: "Brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter" (2 Thess. 2:14).

Our Lord Came Not to Abolish, But to Fulfill

Not even the Apostles rejected the traditional Jewish liturgy they received; they maintained the daily cycle of the Psalms of David and united the worship of the synagogue and the temple by means of the Mass of the Catechumens and the Mass of the Faithful. Jesus no more came to abolish the synagogue and temple worship than He came to abolish the law and the prophets; quite the contrary, as He fulfilled or brought to completion the law and the prophets (cf. Matt. 5:17), so He fulfilled and brought to completion the verbal worship of the synagogue and the sacrificial worship of the temple. He Himself, the Word of God, the Word made flesh, the Son offered on the Cross for the life of the world, became the substance of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass — the Mass of the Catechumens taking up the synagogue's prayer, and the Mass of the Faithful taking up the temple's holocausts. The

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tradition of Jewish worship finds its ultimate point of arrival in, and yet is surpassed by, the unspeakable gift of the Savior's divine life. So too, the gift first given sacramentally at the Last Supper and ratified in the once-for-all bloody sacrifice of Calvary finds its full ecclesial manifestation in the organically developed liturgical rites of East and West. There we find that the concentrated meaning placed by Our Lord into a few compact and powerful words, gestures, and materials are unfolded by Holy Mother Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit for our greater access, our better engagement, our further instruction, our spiritual exercise and indeed our astonishment and confoundment.

For fifteen centuries, the Church did exactly this — striving to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, and striving also, by the guardrails of custom, canon law, and rubrics, to avoid doing the work of the Lord negligently — and she did this, for fifteen hundred years, *without papal intervention*. The missal that sat on every Christian altar from one end of Christendom to the other had been put there not by a pope, not even necessarily by a bishop, but by the hands of many generations of clergy and religious, copying out their missals line by line on the skins of animals, binding them stoutly in leather. When St. Pius V issued *Quo Primum* in 1570, he was merely codifying — or better said, *canonizing* — what the Church in Rome had already traditionally been doing for centuries. So far from being a vindication of any supposed freedom to dispose of liturgy as he pleased, this great pope rather vindicated the prior unassailable dignity of immemorial tradition — what the Council of Trent called "the received and approved rites."[1]

In general, although gradual development is normal and healthy, especially in the direction of addition or expansion (to augment the glory of the liturgy, to glorify God and sanctity the people), the *lex orandi* or law of prayer already in place is to be jealously guarded and religiously maintained, and novelty in the sense of a sudden and drastic change is to be avoided. This is the Catholic attitude; it has always been and must always be the Catholic attitude. When Pope Benedict XVI famously stated, "What earlier generations held as sacred *remains* sacred and great for us too, and it cannot be all of a sudden entirely forbidden or even considered harmful. It behooves all of us to preserve the riches which have developed in the Church's faith and prayer, and to give them their proper place," he wasn't asking us to be obedient to his or anyone's whimsical dictate or condescending pastoral provision; he was asking us to recognize and remain faithful to a true principle, one that has always been true and will always be true. If it is not true, then we have no reason to trust the Church of yesterday, today, or tomorrow. If, on the contrary, we trust the Church, then we must embrace her tradition. It's as simple as that.

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Bishop Schneider Explains the True Catholic Understanding of the Mass

The great merit of Bishop Schneider's book *The Catholic Mass* is that it explains, with great simplicity, elegance, and thoroughness, the true Catholic understanding of the Mass, and focuses clearly and cogently on the central question: as the subtitle says, "Steps to Restore the Centrality of God in the Liturgy." For, as Joseph Ratzinger pointed out, liturgy in modern times is often conducted as if God did not even exist, or as if He has been utterly domesticated and subordinated to our (supposed) needs, conveniences, and political agendas. God has been marginalized. In the post-Vatican II Church, He is the most marginalized of the marginalized. Bishop Schneider sets out to demonstrate how and why the liturgy must be centered on God — becoming once again "the divine liturgy."

His Excellency helps us to see what liturgy is *in its essence*, and what attitudes or dispositions are appropriate for it. To do so, he must tell us all the dimensions of worship. Instead of taking an historical approach, as does Michael Fiedrowicz in *The Traditional Mass*, or a phenomenological approach, as does Romano Guardini in *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, or a systematic approach as does Joseph Ratzinger in his own *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Bishop Schneider adopts a thematic and spiritual approach. Like the legend that has the twelve Apostles each uttering one of the articles of the Apostles' Creed, or like a question in St. Thomas's *Summa Theologiae* divided into articles, the twelve chapters of Bishop Schneider's book establish the fundamental "articles" or aspects of the Mass. These are: the Mass is Prayer; the Mass is Adoration; the Mass is Ritual; the Mass is Sacrifice; the Mass is Splendor; the Mass is Sacred Action; the Mass is Thanksgiving; the Mass is Listening; the Mass is the Church's Life; the Mass is Salvation's Source; the Mass is Sacred Service; the Mass is the Wedding Feast.

Some of these aspects may seem to be obvious — do we not all know that the Mass is prayer? — but the obvious has never been less obvious than today (it seems that in many places prayer is the last word that would come to mind in connection with Mass!), and, more to the point, mystery is infinitely susceptible to meditation. We need to draw forth what is implicit in our faith and allow it to form our minds and hearts more actively. New lights are to be had if we ponder anew the great truths handed down by tradition. This, in fact, is how theology and spirituality grow over time: it is not the truth that changes, but our apprehension and communication of it.

One way in which this genuine progress occurs is by the bringing-together of an abundance of diverse, well-chosen sources to illuminate that which we already know but wish to understand more deeply. Bishop Schneider, an expert in Patristics and a widely-read former

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professor, pulls out all the stops in *The Catholic Mass*, regaling us with quotations from Church Fathers like St. Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Origen, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Jerome, St. Leo the Great, St. John Chrysostom, and St. John Damascene; Doctors of the Church like St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, St. Francis de Sales, St. Alphonsus Liguori, and St. Thérèse of Lisieux; medieval or early modern authors such as St. Francis of Assisi, William Durand, Johannes Tauler, Denis the Carthusian, St. Leonard of Port Maurice, and Bishop Bossuet; modern writers like Dom Prosper Guéranger, St. John Henry Newman, St. Peter Julian Eymard, Nicholas Gihr, Bl. Columba Marmion, Bl. Ildefons Schuster, Paul Claudel, Dietrich von Hildebrand, Charles Journet, Romano Guardini, Klaus Gamber, Evelyn Waugh, Fulton Sheen, Joseph Ratzinger, and Martin Mosebach; and magisterial sources like the Council of Trent and a host of popes who teach *una voce*, as well as altogether neglected gems from the discussions that took place at Vatican II. A book like this is an education unto itself — a veritable symphony orchestra of instruments of tradition that surrounds us with the rich sound of Catholicism, the same yesterday, today, and forever (cf. Heb. 13:8).

Most refreshingly of all, at least from my perspective as a traditionalist writer, is Bishop Schneider's total fearlessness in bringing forward the traditional Latin Mass as the gold standard, the benchmark, the exemplar and paradigm of what Holy Mass is, how it is to be celebrated, how it should be understood and approached and *lived*. The continuing and permanent value of the traditional Roman Rite is taken for granted, as it was taken for granted by Benedict XVI in the face of the bizarre aberration of the liturgical revolution of the 1960s that divorced the Church's life of worship from its own past. Although Bishop Schneider accepts the validity of the Novus Ordo and sees a place for it in the Church, he does not vainly imagine it is adequate as it stands, or that it can long survive without the beneficent influence and powerful "gravitational force" of the classical Roman Rite. For example, Bishop Schneider emphasizes the exemplary perfection of the Latin Mass in regard to Eucharistic reverence and adoration, the complementary roles of music and silence, and the correct understanding of all-male sanctuary ministry in its sevenfold realization (porter, exorcist, lector, acolyte, subdeacon, deacon, and priest).

Whoever Attacks the Traditional Mass Attacks the Catholic Faith

Whoever attacks this traditional form of the Mass, which truly merits the name "Roman Rite," is attacking all that is Catholic — the historical, traditional, ancient, and ancestral rituals that expressed, inculcated, and transmitted the orthodox faith that comes to us from Christ and the Apostles. Such a person is attacking the host of saints, the "cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1), whose faith and charity were nourished on the Church's traditional liturgical rites. From an ecclesiological point of view, nothing could be more self-

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contradictory than attacking or in any way limiting the use of the Roman Rite in its immemorial form. Thus, when Bishop Schneider explains the improvements or changes that must take place to restore the centrality of God in the liturgy, he effectively tells us to traditionalize, to Tridentinize (as it were), what we are doing. Anything that is right with our liturgy necessarily has its roots in tradition. We must become familiar with tradition and give it a warm welcome, as befits a Catholic. There is, indeed, no Catholicism without it.

Here I cannot avoid adding that it is absolutely absurd for the hierarchy of the Church to discourage or try to prevent the faithful from attending the traditional form of the Catholic liturgy that attracts them and nourishes them. As Benedict XVI recognized in the letter that accompanied *Summorum Pontificum*:

> "Immediately after the Second Vatican Council it was presumed that requests for the use of the 1962 Missal would be limited to the older generation which had grown up with it, but in the meantime it has clearly been demonstrated that young persons too have discovered this liturgical form, felt its attraction and found in it a form of encounter with the Mystery of the Most Holy Eucharist, particularly suited to them."

May I say something obvious? Liturgy is *supposed* to attract us and nourish us in the mysteries of Christ. Only a pagan or an infidel or an apostate or a demon would wish to see the suppression of "a form of encounter with the Mystery of the Most Holy Eucharist particularly suited" to young people — and obviously not only to young people, but to all ages! All the more is such an attack unjustifiable and intolerable when it targets not some kind of wild, experimental, charismatic liturgy, but the most venerable rite of all of Christendom, the immemorial Roman Rite, which is so ancient that its Roman Canon predates the Byzantine anaphoras of St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil the Great. Yes, the Second Vatican Council called for a *moderate* reform, but what came afterward was by no means a moderate reform, not by any stretch of the imagination. Moreover, in contrast with a dogmatic declaration that is and must be true, a prudential program of reform is neither true nor false, but either successful or unsuccessful. It has no *guarantee* of success and must be evaluated precisely by its practical outcomes. On that standard, the pope should be reining in the Novus Ordo, not the Latin Mass. But we need not dwell on these matters, as they are no doubt familiar to those who are present this evening.

I will only say this: there is *nothing* more urgently necessary today in the Church than overcoming false notions of obedience, which play into the hands of the enemies of Christ who wish for nothing more than to sever the Church *once for all* from the faith and morals

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and liturgy she once upheld and treasured. It simply cannot be denied anymore that many rulers in the Church are abusing their authority. Our principled resistance to those who are themselves disobedient to divine law, natural law, and ecclesiastical tradition — whether this resistance of ours takes the form of open confrontation or a more subtle, indirect effort to bypass and undermine their agendas and enactments — is not a matter of "being disobedient." It is recognizing what is inherently right, using the twin gifts of faith and reason, and then *doing* it in the fear and love of God. Obedience is grounded always in reason and in the *sensus fidei*. It must never contradict them, cancel them out, or trample on them. Bishop Schneider himself, having grown up in a Soviet Union that relied on blind obedience to the diktats of the controlling Communist Party, and having later experienced the still more insidious forms of cultural conformism and social pressure at work in liberal Western democracies even to the liberalization and secularization of the Catholic Faith, understands very well the use and abuse of obedience—its role as a tremendous virtue, founded upon the truth and aspiring to perfection, or its inverted image, a treacherous vice wedded to self-interest, cringing before power, and resulting in a dead conscience.[2]

Persevering Amidst the Ruins

Returning, in conclusion, to Bishop Schneider's book, I would like to draw your attention in a special way to its remarkable cover, which was specially chosen by the author. Here we see a photograph of St. Paul's Cathedral in Münster, Germany, in 1946, after the Allied bombing of the city. The church has been gashed open by explosions. A gaping wound lets the light of day stream in to the apse. Like the Lord Jesus in His Passion, the church is despised, abject, acquainted with infirmity (cf. Isa. 53:3). This is our situation at the sixtieth anniversary of the opening of Vatican II: the Catholic Church in the West is in ruins. A new iconoclasm swept through and destroyed the beauty of countless churches and their furnishings. Above all, the icon of the Holy Mass and the other sacramental rites were themselves vandalized almost beyond recognition. The liturgy was violently removed from its bimillenial arc of providential development.

Yet all the same, tradition carries on. In this moving photograph we are astonished — and then consoled — to discover that Holy Mass is taking place in spite of everything, the great Mass of the Roman Rite. The priest, deacon, and subdeacon continue to offer the Solemn Mass, heedless of the rubble, the missing walls, the absent faithful, the cold and damp conditions, or whatever other inconveniences or obstacles beset them. They will be faithful to the *opus Dei*, the work of God, the sacred liturgy, the *divine* liturgy. They have not forgotten the centrality of God. They will not be cursed in their negligent *cultus*. They are striving to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, as best they can, in spite of the odds against them, in spite of the hostile environs. After Bugnini's bombardment; after

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Bergoglio's backwardism; after whatever this or that bishop has done or failed to do, our local church might feel a lot like that bombed-out cathedral, and we, by the grace of God and by the true obedience that takes the form of courageous adherence to the truth and determined fidelity to tradition, can be like those intrepid ministers in that cavernous church, carrying on with the work of God that saves our souls.

Bishop Schneider's *The Catholic Mass* is, you might say, a kind of "how-to" manual: it teaches us how to avoid the curse of negligence, slackness, and fraudulence, and how to ensure the beauty of holiness — how to offer the pleasing sacrifice of Abel instead of the displeasing one of Cain (cf. Gen. 4:1-5). Be sure to pick up a copy of the book for yourself and perhaps an extra to give away as a gift. Keep the faith, and fight the good fight. And thank you for your kind attention.

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[1] Session VII (Mar. 3, 1547), Canons on the Sacraments in General, can. 13 (D.H. 1613).

[2] For more on this subject, see Peter A. Kwasniewski, *True Obedience in the Church* (Sophia Institute Press, 2021).

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