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While a priest is indispensable for the celebration of the Eucharist, the celebration is not a solitary act. Every Christian ought to attend and ought to play their part. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* tells us that “to promote active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and songs, as well as by actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes” (30).

In my *May* article I pointed out that active participation doesn't mean giving everybody a few lines to say or a song to sing, but this does not take away from the fact that when we celebrate the liturgy there are things that must be done, and these ministries should be done to the best of our ability with proper preparation, practice and formation. In the early Church there was no liturgy where the priest did everything. Indeed, early liturgical books were often produced as small volumes, so that each minister would have a book that contained only the parts of the Eucharist that they were responsible for. In the early Middle Ages we find books with only the Epistle Readings, with only the Antiphons and other sung elements, with the Gospel reading, the Sacramentary with only the celebrant's parts. But gradually these books were consolidated in a Missal that contained everything. The earliest extant example of this type of liturgical book is the *Stowe Missal*. This book from the early ninth century, is associated with the *Céli Dé* renewal movement and it was kept for many years in Lorrha, Co. Tipperary.

These new Missals contained everything needed to say the Eucharist and soon some Eucharists began to be celebrated exclusively by the priest, with the priest assuming the parts of all the other ministers. Parallel to this, Western theology and spirituality developed to value the fruits of offering the celebration of the Eucharist for a particular intention. There was a gradual multiplication of Eucharistic celebration and sometimes the Eucharist was celebrated with no one other than the priest being

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present. This led to a number of liturgical abuses and gradually to the celebration of what is usually called “private Masses.”¹

Many of these celebrations were far from edifying. Indeed, they may have played a role in Martin Luther’s break with the Catholic Church. Later in life Luther attributed his strong dissatisfaction with the Catholic Church partly to his experiences during his 1510 visit to Rome. Here he was scandalized by the manner the Roman priests celebrated the Eucharist. He noted how “Mass was said with such breathless speed that even he, who was exceedingly familiar with every word found it utterly unintelligible” These celebration were often finished in under nine minutes.² The reform of the liturgy in the wake of the Council of Trent did not emphasize ritual *splendour*. Instead the stress was on sacramental *validity* and on making sure that the bare minimum was always present so that the form and the matter were properly observed.

The adoption of the Missal had also led to the mentality that the prayer texts only had value if the priest said them. This led to the situation whereby if a choir or schola sung the parts of the Eucharist, the priest still had to say them so that they would “count.” During elaborate musical renditions of the Gloria or the Creed, the celebrant would often read the text himself and then sit down on a stool while he was waiting for the sung version to finish.

Prior to Vatican II there were comparatively few solemn High Masses. Most celebrations of the Eucharist took place in great *simplicity*. There was no music and, apart from the altar boy, no minister other than the priest. While the celebration may have taken longer than nine minutes, many were still celebrated in a very short time. Even after the practice of frequent Communion was adopted in the early twentieth century, this took place outside of the actual liturgical order. Dom Botte, one of the main liturgical scholars of the postconciliar period, tells us how Communion was distributed in his youth:

‘Communion was distributed before Mass, after Mass, and in the middle of Mass, but never at the moment indicated by the liturgy. The schedule was the determining factor: Communion was distributed every fifteen minutes. When Mass began on the hour you were sure to see, as the clock struck quarter past, a priest in a surplice come out of the sacristy, rush to the altar, and interrupt the celebrant in order to take a ciborium out of the tabernacle. The celebrant then was allowed to continue the Mass until he was disturbed once again by the ciborium being returned

1 Theodore Klauser, *A Short History of Western Liturgy: An Account and Some Reflections*. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 101-108.

2 Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World* (New York: Viking, 2017), 62.

to the tabernacle. When one of my sisters asked the advice of the dean of the upper end of Charleroi, Monsignor Lalieu (a doctor of theology and the author of a book on the Mass), about the best time to receive Communion, he recommended she receive before Mass and then offer Mass in thanksgiving for Communion. This sounds strange to us, but we ought to keep in mind the ideas then current. Mass was no longer the prayer of the Christian community. The clergy prayed entirely in place of and in the name of the community. As a result, the faithful were only remotely involved and paid attention to their own personal devotion. Communion appeared to be a private devotion without any special link to the Mass.³

Indeed, this *priest-centred* liturgy was appealing to certain types of spirituality. Evelyn Waugh, a convert to Catholicism and the author of *Brideshead Revisited* was appalled by the changes introduced after the Second Vatican Council. He was most definitely not a fan of a liturgy that was celebrated in a professional manner. He proposed that the pre-Vatican II practice whereby the faithful attended the liturgy “often dumbly and effectively” was usually better than the post-conciliar experience.⁴ He credited his own conversion to Catholicism to a banal style of liturgy. He tells us that, “of the extraneous attractions of the Church which most drew me was the spectacle of the priest and the server, stumping up to the altar without a glance to discover how many or how few he had in his congregation; a craftsman and his apprentice, a man with a job which he alone was qualified to do.”⁵

Today, I would propose that this “stumping” style of liturgy is no longer fit for purpose. While it may be valid from a technical point of view, it is most definitely *not* the style of liturgy that is envisioned by the Council with its emphasis on active participation. But I do think that Waugh was not incorrect in his observation, the Eucharist often was celebrated by a “stumping” priest who acted as a sort of sacred functionary. A survey of seminaries in French-speaking areas during the 1950’s showed that there was a great lack of trained liturgy teachers and that seminarians were usually given their liturgical formation by whoever was least occupied in the seminary faculty. One study showed how the liturgy classes were most often assigned to the seminary bursar!⁶ Many years ago I recall meeting a retired professor of liturgy at an American

3 Bernard Botte, *From Silence to Participation: An Insider's View of Liturgical Reform*, translated by John Sullivan (Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1988), 1-2.

4 Alcuin Reid, ed., *A Bitter Trial: Evelyn Waugh and John Cardinal Heenan on the Liturgical Changes*. 2nd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2011), 39.

5 Reid, *Evelyn Waugh and John Cardinal Heenan*, 57-58.

6 Botte, *From Silence to Participation*, 86.

seminary. He shared with me his experience of training seminarians to say the Mass. A large part of the training entailed his standing behind the seminarians back with a ruler, hitting the seminarian's hand if he moved it from between his shoulders.

While today things are better regarding seminary training, many liturgies are celebrated with little *preparation*. Number 352 of the *GIRM* recommends that "harmonious planning and carrying out of the rites will be of great assistance in disposing the faithful to participate in the Eucharist." In certain cases, the various ministers receive next to no training or formation. Often there is no preparation for the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist. There may be a choir, lector and Eucharistic ministers, but there has been no specific preparation for any given liturgy. It is assumed that everyone knows what they are doing and there is no need to co-ordinate anything. In some parishes the only criterion for exercising a ministry seems to be willingness to do it. Whether or not a person is able to project their voice or have the academic formation necessary to proclaim a Scripture reading is irrelevant when choosing a lector. We are too afraid of hurting people's feelings when we make these determinations. We are so desperate for ministers that the fact that a prospective choir member doesn't have a note in their head, doesn't preclude their being invited to join the choir. Altar servers often do no more than look pretty. At best they ring the bell, even though this is only an option. We take children, dress them in liturgical garb and have them perform an unnecessary service. God forbid that they be asked to process with candles and a Cross or that we use incense at a Sunday Mass! Our problem is partly due to the fact that we are not used to training ministers and partly due to the chronic shortage of willing volunteers, therefore we seem to welcome all and sundry to liturgical ministry. While all are welcome to form part of the liturgical assembly, liturgical ministers should be chosen from that assembly with some consideration to their aptitude and be provided with the requisite training. Then, when they have been trained, there is a need for ongoing formation and the preparation and planning of how any given liturgy should unfold.

Liturgy is not an *amateur* pursuit. It takes preparation. The priest needs to be prepared, but so do all the other ministers. There are many options in liturgy and if we work together we can celebrate in a more effective manner. In other aspects of our lives we expect professionalism, the liturgy should be no different. If a hospital buys a new MRI machine, then everyone involved in its running needs specialist training and certification. This is only common sense. How come this common sense seems to depart from us when we are dealing with the liturgy?