

“SOURCE AND SUMMIT”: VATICAN COUNCIL II AND THE SACRED LITURGY

In the final encyclical of his **long and fruitful** pontificate, St. John Paul II wrote about the Eucharist. Traditionally, the document’s title is derived from its opening line, and significant forethought goes into it. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003) begins: “The Church draws her life from the Eucharist. This truth does not simply express a daily experience of faith, but recapitulates *the heart of the mystery of the Church*.” Indeed, the Church draws her life from the Eucharist. The Second Vatican Council began **60 years ago** this past week and its **very first** document was promulgated in 1963, just a few months after I was born. In *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the **Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy**, an expression was used in the context of the liturgy: “Nevertheless the liturgy is the **summit** (L: *culmen*) toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the **font** (L: *fons*) from which all her power flows.” (SC, #10)

A year later, the **Dogmatic Constitution on the Church** reinforces the point: “Taking part in the Eucharistic sacrifice, which is the **fount and apex** of the whole Christian life, they offer the Divine Victim to God, and offer themselves along with It.” In post-conciliar translations, this phrase has come to us as “source and summit,” which probably has a better ring to it than **fount and apex**, I imagine. But the sense is the same. The Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life”. But that phrase had roots **even earlier** than Vatican II. On the Feast of Corpus Christi in **1902**, Pope Leo XIII wrote an encyclical entitled *Mirae Caritatis*, “Wondrous Love” in which he speaks of society at the turn of the 20th century and its endless quest for prosperity. Here in the U.S., this was the “gilded age” we studied in American history, the age of industrial revolution, in which **society** was **rapidly** moving away from a sustenance model.

In his own day, the Pope reminded the faithful (para #6) that while the world “anxiously strives for prosperity, and trusts to it alone, it is pursuing an object that ever escapes it, clinging to one that ever eludes the grasp.” What is the **antidote** to what he called a “race for wealth, to a struggle for the possession of commodities which minister to the love of comfort and display?” He spells it out: “But the **source and chief** (*fons et caput*) of all these gifts is the venerable Eucharist, which not only nourishes and sustains that life the desire whereof demands our most strenuous efforts, but also enhances beyond measure that dignity of man of which in these days we hear so much.” Notice that *fons et caput* is **quite similar** to what would appear **60 years** later in Vatican II. While the Council Fathers innovated with respect to the liturgy, they **did not** create *ex nihilo*.

Just as Pope Leo XIII emphasized the **transformative** power of the Eucharist, so too did the Council fathers. So, what is meant in saying that the sacred liturgy is source and summit? For starters, it is given priority. When serving in the Vocations Office in the **mid-1990’s**, I enjoyed visiting parishes to speak about vocations, while experiencing a variety of liturgical practices and customs. I **chuckle** recalling one rural parish. At 9:58, the pastor (God rest his soul!) and I stood at the **back** of Church waiting to begin Sunday Mass. Suddenly he stepped forward, gazed up to the **choir loft** and said loudly– “So, **what** should we **sing** today?” Some banter ensued and bingo– they announced the hymn. I held my composure, vowing that as a pastor, my liturgy meetings would be more substantive!

Pope John XXIII outlined **three** main **priorities** of the Council in his official Christmas Day 1961 letter summoning bishops to attend: the better **internal ordering** of the church, **unity** among Christians, and the promotion of **peace** throughout the world. Since the Sacred Liturgy is central to life in the Church, it is no surprise that the **first document** released was dedicated to this. Even though much preparation took place prior to the Council, it opened with **strong opposition** to any pre-determined agenda on the part of the Roman Curia. Our own **Archbishop William Brady** was a member of the preparatory commission on church governance, one of 11 such groups. But on Oct.

1, 1961, Brady died in Rome of a massive coronary. The Council fathers desired serious input from all across the globe. Since prepared schemas were rejected, the drafters went back to the drawing board. Vatican II was no “**rubber stamp**” of committee documents.

In a future column, I will cover aspects of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, one of the most **consequential**– and ultimately **contentious**– of the Council’s **16** documents. Yet, there is **no controversy** about the place the liturgy occupies– it is **central** to all we believe and do as Catholics. I hope that you see evidence of this here, e.g., how the **hymn choices** at the Cathedral are often keyed to the readings, feast or liturgical season. There is deliberate planning. We meet weekly to review past liturgies and plan future ones. Our **lectors** practice their readings, our **cantors** rehearse. If the **altar servers** look confident in the sanctuary, it is because they **take pride** in their work and are well trained. **Intentionality** produces a reverent Eucharist, manifesting our belief that the Mass is truly both source and summit. (To be continued)

- Gun violence in St. Paul is always troubling. However, if you scour the **news** accounts, so often the victims and perpetrators are **extremely young**, legally minors. Investigators were partially aided by school video cameras appearing to show the 16-year-old acting out the scene. The victim was also 16. Today, **personal disagreements** escalate into shootings in a split second. One life lost, the other forever changed. To date, twenty-nine homicides have occurred in 2022.
- Big Tech, big fail! **Cancel culture** has reached Google apps. The popular “**Covenant Eyes**” and “Accountability2You” apps have been **removed** from the Google Play store. What? Accountability apps are a recent tool to **assist** in controlling pornography addictions. By tracking a user’s internet use, they allow a friend, mentor or parent to access the log. Many describe them as a **Godsend**. Perhaps that’s the problem!
- Inquiring minds want to know– what’s the **best invention** during your lifetime? For me, I would say that it’s a toss-up between the **iPhone** (2007) and **microwave bacon** (1988). It all depends on the day! J
- I recently attended a celebration of the **100th anniversary** of my home parish of **Nativity of Our Lord** in St. Paul. It is the **only parish** I ever knew, and where I was baptized, confirmed and celebrated my first Mass. Whenever I return, I am flooded with memories. Upon buying their first house in 1959, my parents joined the parish, were committed and stayed. Thank you! *Ad multos annos*, Nativity!
- Following up on my October 9 column, I encourage **high school** students to join me for the **National March for Life** in Washington D.C. I pray some Cathedral parishioners will join the Archdiocesan group. The theme is “What does a Post-*Roe* America look like? Former NFL Super Bowl champion Coach **Tony Dungy** is among the speakers. For more information visit www.marchforlife.org.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector

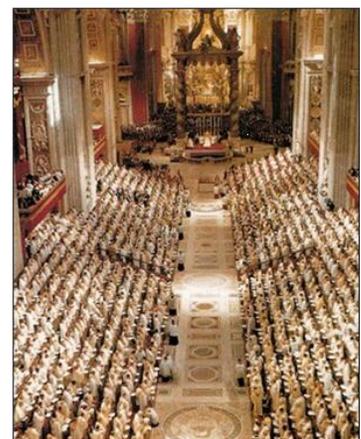


Photo: The Vatican Council II Fathers assembled for a General Session in St. Peter's Basilica. A total of 2,881 bishops participated in at least one session of the four held between 1962-1965.