



The Holy See

**LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II
FOR THE NATIONAL LITURGICAL WEEK OF ITALY IN ASSISI
(26-30 AUGUST 2002)**

Your Excellency,

The National Liturgical Week that this year will take place in Assisi from 26 to 30 August and is dedicated to the provocative subject: *Liturgy, Epiphany of the Mystery* is an important annual event for the Church in Italy, since it allows those who are involved in promoting and fostering the liturgy in the Christian community, to pray, reflect together and share their experience.

For this reason, the Holy Father desires to convey to you, to the organizers and the participants in this important meeting, his greeting, his cordial appreciation of this useful initiative and his hope that the work of the congress will bear abundant fruit for a better understanding of the liturgy, the inexhaustible "fount" and authentic "summit" of the life of the Church (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 10).

Enriched by the extraordinary event of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 and encouraged by the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, the Church in Italy has rightly adopted a missionary perspective with the firm will "to put out into the deep", while drawing on the source that nourishes the commitment of Christians, the liturgy itself, epiphany of the Mystery of Christ.

The 53rd National Liturgical Week correctly desires to move within the pastoral directions of the Italian Bishops' Conference - *Communicating the Gospel in a Changing World* - and has accepted the task of clarifying how the liturgical celebrations issue the call to communicate the Risen Lord giving to each of the faithful the apostolic energy to take into the world the saving message of the Gospel.

But what style (volto) should we impress on the liturgy in order to communicate the Gospel in a changing world? In the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte* the Supreme Pontiff writes: "Our

principal attention must be given to the liturgy, "the summit towards which the Church's action tends and at the same time the source from which comes all her strength". In the 20th century, especially since the Council, there has been a great development in the way the Christian community celebrates the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. It is necessary to continue in this direction, and to stress particularly *the Sunday Eucharist* and *Sunday* itself experienced as a special day of faith, the day of the Risen Lord and of the gift of the Spirit, the true weekly Easter" (n. 35).

So there is a great need for listening and comparison; for theological foundations on which they can anchor the choices of pastoral liturgy; for priests - witnesses of the mystery - who allow themselves to be guided by the Spirit and are professional enough to follow the liturgical norms and apply them in the concrete pastoral situations; for Christian congregations who live the sense of participation, who are attentive to direction and ready to exercise a more adequate and informed liturgical service; for celebrations that can overcome the obstacles of dispersion, fragmentation of the community, passivity and indifference.

In this perspective, His Holiness encourages you and all who take part in the convention to consider how to make the Sunday Eucharist more living and better participated in. In this regard, His Holiness urges you: "*Sharing in the Eucharist* should really be *the heart of Sunday* for every baptized person. It is a fundamental duty, to be fulfilled not just in order to observe a precept but as something felt as essential to a truly informed and consistent Christian life" (ibid., n. 36).

Draw from the Eucharist the vigour for the renewal of parish life so that all may meet Christ. The text of the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, aptly integrated into nn. 47-49 of the *Guidelines of the Italian Church*, shows the central place of the Eucharist at the heart of parish life. Indeed, the community that has the task of communicating the Gospel grows and matures around the Eucharist on Sunday, the Lord's Day.

Thus your convention must be a reminder to return to the roots of the faith and mission of the Church by means of a more conscious participation in the Mass. Everyone must draw from the Eucharist the vigour for the spiritual renewal which will help diocesan and parish communities joyfully celebrate the Mystery, so that the entire People of God may be increasingly oriented to a living and life-giving encounter with Christ.

For this reason, the Holy Father hopes that in the activities of the Week you will evaluate places, spaces, times and occasions for the encounter with the Lord, and direct your reflection to a liturgy that will be attentive to the expectations of the faithful, and also to the needs of baptized persons who do not regularly participate in the Church's liturgical and sacramental life.

At the same time, the Supreme Pontiff assures you of his special remembrance in prayer for the successful outcome of the Liturgical Week. With these sentiments and wishes, as he invokes the

heavenly protection of the Virgin Mary, he cordially imparts to you, to the Bishop of Assisi and to the other Bishops and priests present, to the presenters and to all the participants in the meeting a special Apostolic Blessing.

As I join my personal greeting and good wishes for the success of this important ecclesial event, I take the occasion to confirm that I am,

Devotedly yours in the Lord,
Cardinal Angelo Sodano,
Secretary of State