

June 2008 Newsletter



St. Sharbel Mission

10325 RANCHO DESTINO RD

LAS VEGAS NV 89183



A special appeal from Msgr. Sami and Fr. Nabil.

Dear parishioners and friends,

First we would like to tell you that we are so proud of all the members of our community here in Las Vegas, who came together, held the flame and worked hard for many years to build the home of Saint Sharbel. Now this home is up and the hall is ready. The modular church is ready, along with a little stay-in for the priest, and some offices. What a graceful and exciting time to see the fruit of your hard work become a reality. This accomplishment belongs to everyone of you. Now we are appealing to your generosity as we are getting close to start paying our mortgage dues. The monthly payment of 6,650 dollars is manageable. The church facilities will help our children and grandchildren grow, and will preserve our great faith and traditions in this city. We hope that just like you did before, you will come together as one united community, and embrace this endeavor. For those who contribute monthly, please try to give more than usual. To those who for many reasons were not capable of participating, we encourage you to do as much as you can to help raise the money needed for the monthly dues. We are hoping that you can contact your friends here, or anyplace, and invite them to help at this time. This will be very beneficial to us. Please do not let Saint Sharbel down.

We are appealing to your generosity, zealously and good will until the hall is fully equipped, as we are hoping that by the intercession of Saint Sharbel, it can help us generate some of the funds needed, so the burden can be reduced.

We will be keeping you posted on the progress every month, before it is time to pay our dues. Please try to put aside a piggy bank every month for this purpose. This will guarantee that Saint Sharbel will remain here, with your families, and will bring many blessings to your city and everyone around you, for generations to come. We fully trust in your good will, and we believe that you can raise up to this second step in the life of our faith community. Please remember the sacrifice that Msgr. Sami is offering to our community, as he has not requested any compensation for himself. What he did is definitely a great contribution towards this great cause.

We pray that every month, we will be successful in fulfilling our monthly dues.

May Saint Sharbel give you the strength you need and may the Lord bless every step you take in your life.

For all newsletter prayer requests, suggestions or comments, please send a message to stsharbel.lv@gmail.com

Parish News

We congratulate Mr. And Mrs. Maurice Jabbour, the first couple to be married in our church building. We offer our condolences to the Chahayed, Dagher and Hickey families for the loss of their loved ones. We would like to wish all our fathers, especially Msgr. Sami and Fr. Nabil a Happy Father's Day June 15th. We are planning a picnic on Father's Day. More details about this and June masses will be communicated by email or telephone . Please make sure we have your current information so we can keep you updated.

Return to Our Roots

Recovering Western Liturgical Traditions

By Robert F. Taft | MAY 26, 2008 | Originally published in “America, The National Catholic Weekly”

These are frustrating times for Vatican II loyalists, as the council's mandated liturgical renewal comes under attack by those who “look back in anger”—to borrow the title of John Osborne's 1956 play—at real or imagined deficiencies of the liturgical renewal carried out after the Second Vatican Council. I have been asked to comment on the present situation from my perspective as a specialist in the liturgical heritage of the Christian East. Note that I am neither a liturgist nor a liturgical reformer, but a historian of the liturgy who believes his task is to point out the facts of liturgical history and what they might mean for today. As such, I maintain that the Roman Catholic liturgical renewal in the wake of Vatican II was an overwhelming success, returning the liturgy to the people of God to whom it rightly belongs. The reform mandated by the council was not perfect, because nothing but God is perfect. But it was done as well as was humanly possible at the time, and we owe enormous gratitude and respect to those who had the vision to implement it. So rather than re-examine what has already been done well, I will concentrate on what the reform did not do well.

My list of what was not done well or not done at all leaves aside the overly creative liturgies and other abuses that accompanied the reform. These were the fault of individuals, and not what Vatican II mandated. Nor does my list include anything the “reformers of the reform” want to reverse, like the celebration of liturgy in the vernacular, Communion in the hand, Mass facing the people or the removal of the tabernacle to a sacrament chapel.

A list of work still to be done would include the order of the Christian initiation of infants, the Liturgy of the Hours, the practice of taking holy Communion from the tabernacle during Mass and the retreat from any meaningful reform of the sacrament of reconciliation, which has left confession a disappearing sacrament, at least in North America. Regarding all of these except the last, Catholics might learn from the East.

In the pre- and post-Vatican II Roman Catholic liturgical renewal, the following were directly inspired by the East: the restoration of Holy Week and the Easter Vigil under Pius XII, liturgy in the vernacular, the Spirit-epiclesis in the new post-Vatican II Roman-rite anaphoras (which calls on the Spirit to consecrate these gifts), eucharistic concelebration, Communion under both species, the permanent (and married) diaconate, the recomposition of the ancient unity of Christian initiation in the justly famous Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, revisions in the rites of ordination and confirmation, and the attempts (in my view unsuccessful) to restore the Liturgy of the Hours.

This influence resulted from a long process of maturation in two fundamental phases: a felt need and a search for solutions consonant with tradition. The need was to renew the Roman liturgy so that, as the council's “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy” says, the faithful might “be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebration which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, and to which the Christian people...have a right and an obligation by reason of their baptism” (No. 14). The solution consonant with tradition demanded that the rites “be restored to the vigor they had in the tradition of the Fathers” (No. 50).

That is where the East came in, when the liturgical movement among francophone Catholics drew inspiration from contacts with the Orthodox of the Russian emigration who had found refuge in France in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. As a protagonist and historian of the liturgical movement, Dom Olivier Rousseau, O.S.B. (1898-1984), explained, this was because “the Orthodox Church has preserved the liturgical spirit of the early church, and continues to live by this spirit, to drink from it as from its purest source.... This church has never departed in its piety and its offices from the liturgical spirit of the early church, to which it has always remained faithful.”

What the liturgical movement did, however, was not so much imitate existing Eastern usage, as make decisions on the basis of perceived pastoral need and then find justification and support in patristic and Eastern precedents, as interpreted in the light of those needs. In other words, Western Catholics’ view of Eastern liturgy and its presumed virtues is simply a mirror of their own deepest longings.

One such virtue is that Eastern liturgy has remained a stable, holistic, traditional synthesis of ritual and symbolic structure that permits liturgy to do what it is supposed to do without the self-consciousness of present-day liturgy in the West. There is a sameness, familiarity and repetitiveness at the very basis of day-to-day human culture, and Eastern tradition has retained this. Men and women who wish to gather to praise God need regularity and consistency in their prayer, which is why people object to having their worship changed every time their pastor reads a new article.

The West might learn from the East to recapture a sense of tradition, and stop getting tripped up in its own clichés.

Liturgy should avoid repetition? Repetition is of the essence of ritual behavior. *Liturgy should offer variety?* Too much variety is the enemy of popular participation. *Liturgy should be creative?* But whose creativity? It is presumptuous of those who have never manifested the least creativity in any other aspect of their lives to think they are Beethoven and Shakespeare when it comes to liturgy.

With a view of liturgy as tradition in mind, let me return to my list of what the Second Vatican Council failed to do well or did not do at all.

Initiation. In the theology of the fathers of the church, the church’s earthly song of liturgical praise was but the icon—in the Pauline sense of *mysterion*, a visible appearance that is bearer of the reality it represents—of the once-and-for-all accomplished salvific worship of the Father by his Son. God the Father saves through the saving economy of his incarnate Son, Jesus, who is the icon of that saving God’s work. The church is the present, living icon of that saving Jesus, and the church’s ministerial acts—what we call the liturgy—are the efficacious signs of Jesus’ salvific ministry at work among us.

This is the unitary patristic vision that the Flemish Dominican Edward Schillebeeckx recovered in his sacramental theology, systematizing in modern terms what fathers like Pope Leo the Great said in his *Homily 74 on the Ascension*: “What was visible in our Redeemer has passed over into sacraments.” What Jesus did during his earthly ministry remains permanently, visibly and tangibly available in mystery through the liturgical ministry of the church. The breakdown of this holistic patristic vision into its component parts in the medieval church—leading to a list of seven discrete sacraments—ultimately dissolved in the West the ancient order and unity of the triple mystery of initiation in baptism-chrismation (confirmation)-Eucharist.

The denouement of this collapse came, ironically, as a result of one of the most successful liturgical reforms in history: St. Pius X’s decree *Sacra Tridentina Synodus* (1905) on the frequency of Communion, and his lowering of the age of first holy Communion from adolescence to the age of reason in *Quam Singulari* (1910). Pius X’s stunningly successful reform had the deleterious side effect of shifting the time of first Communion to before confirmation—an unheard-of novelty totally contrary to the universal ancient tradition of East and West—and displacing first confession so that it preceded first Communion. This destroyed the age-old sequence of the rites of Christian initiation. And it turned the sacrament of penance, originally intended to reconcile grave sinners, into one of the rites of Christian initiation in the Catholic West.

The Liturgy of the Hours. Similarly, in the East the Liturgy of the Hours has remained what it was meant to be, an integral part of the worship of God's people. Here too the West has lost its balance, reducing the Divine Office to the prayer of clergy and monastics. In the discussions of the post-Vatican II commission for the reform of the Divine Office, the overriding concern was to produce a prayer book for clergy and religious that would be prayed for the most part in private. Celebration "with the people" was deemed desirable, but the whole tenor and vocabulary of the commission discussions show that this was not the point of departure for understanding the Liturgy of the Hours.

The historical basis underlying much of the debate was gravely deficient, based as it was almost exclusively on post-medieval Latin tradition, with its defects of clericalism, privatization and ignorance of early and Eastern tradition. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that the new Roman Liturgy of the Hours, despite its title, is no liturgy at all, but still just a breviary, or book of prayers.

Communion from the tabernacle. Distributing holy Communion during Mass from hosts already consecrated at a previous Eucharist was totally unthinkable in the early Christian East and West. It is still inconceivable in any authentic Eastern Christian usage today. Nevertheless, it would become and has remained a common practice in Roman-rite usage despite its repeated rejection by the highest Catholic magisterial authorities: in Pope Benedict XIV's encyclical *Certiores Effecti* (1742); in Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Mediator Dei* (1947); in the 1962-1965 instructions and norms for the distribution of holy Communion at Mass; and most recently in the third edition (2002) of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (No. 85).

The reason for disapproval is obvious to anyone familiar with eucharistic theology. The dynamic of the Eucharist is one continuous movement, in which the common community gifts are offered, accepted by God and returned to the community to be shared as God's gift to us, a sharing of something we receive from God and give to one another—in short, a communion.

Communion from the tabernacle is like inviting guests to a banquet, then preparing and eating it oneself, while serving one's guests the leftovers from a previous meal. The symbolism of a common partaking of a common meal is completely destroyed. Holy Communion is the ecclesial communion of the faithful with one another in Christ by sharing together the fruits of his sacrificial heavenly banquet they are offering together. Communion from the tabernacle can hardly claim to signify this. The Latin Middle Ages had forgotten it, and the widespread continuance of the practice of Communion from the tabernacle, which as been repeatedly stigmatized by the highest magisterium, shows that Western Catholic eucharistic piety is still stuck in the same medieval rut.

In the last analysis, the solution to Roman Catholic liturgical problems lies not in an idealization of the Council of Trent or the East. Western Catholics, largely ignorant of the riches of their own living tradition, mistakenly look elsewhere for what they already have. I am disappointed at the failure of contemporary Catholics to understand, appreciate and market the riches of their own Latin tradition. Stuck in the aridity of late-medieval theology, the Catholic West has stalled the great movement of patristic *ressourcement* initiated in postwar France by authors like Yves Congar, O.P., Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P., Jean Daniélou, S.J., and Henri de Lubac, S.J.

The Catholic West does not need to turn East, or to a dead-and-gone-forever medieval or Tridentine past; it needs to return to its roots. Latin Christianity is just as apostolic, ancient, traditional, patristic, spiritual and monastic as that of the East. A Christian culture that produced Chartres and Mont-Saint-Michel; Augustine and Cassian; Benedictine monasticism and Cîteaux; Francis of Assisi, Dominic, Ignatius Loyola, John of the Cross and Charles de Foucauld; Teresa of Ávila, Thérèse of Lisieux and Blessed Mother Teresa; and the popes of my own lifetime does not have to copy anybody except Jesus Christ.

Robert F. Taft, S.J., is emeritus professor of Oriental liturgy at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome and consultor for liturgy of the Vatican Congregation for the Oriental Churches.

St. Sharbel Maronite Catholic Church

Dear Fellow Maronites,

It brings us great pleasure to invite you to the 45th Annual Maronite Convention, sponsored by the National Apostolate of Maronites and hosted by St. Sharbel Church of Somerset, NJ. The event will be held July 2-6, 2008 at the beautiful Doubletree Hotel in Somerset.

The convention theme, *Journey through Faith*, will be the guiding principal throughout the convention weekend. From captivating workshops and lectures, to Multimedia rooms playing significant DVDs around the hour to exciting displays and exhibits in the hospitality suite.

In addition to the workshops and presentations for all ages, there will be plenty of social events. There will be a "Welcome to New Jersey" dinner on Wednesday night; "By the Jersey Boardwalk" themed dinner on Thursday night; Friday night will be "Lebanese Night" and Saturday the traditional Grand Banquet.

Excursions to the Jersey Shore, Philadelphia, and New York City are just a few of the trips planned.

The 2008 Maronite Convention promises to be entertaining as well as spiritually educational to all ages. For more information visit: www.namnews.org Mark your calendars and save the date because we are looking forward to seeing you in the Garden State!



National Apostolate of Maronites

and

Saint Sharbel Maronite Church

Somerset, New Jersey

Invite you to attend the

45th Annual Maronite Convention

July 2 – 6, 2008

www.namnews.org















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For further information about NAM, please contact our local delegates Juliette Hanache or Wissam Dagher.

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