

Weekly Message from Fr William for Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time 2022

Dear People of St Mary's, someone emailed me during the week:

You made a powerful argument for the congregation standing during the Eucharistic Prayer, in your newsletter, but especially in your homily. As you said we have been standing with you for 12 months now. I was left wondering why we are going back to kneeling?

Yes, I do think it makes liturgical sense for us all to stand together for the Eucharistic Prayer, and many congregations around the world do. It's not just me offering the sacrifice of the Mass. It's all of us together. This is clear from the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and it's clear from Pope Francis in his recent letter on the Liturgy, reinforcing the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. (for examples of this see last Sunday's weekly message).

Popes often refer to the Second Vatican Council and also earlier Ecumenical Councils of the Church, of which there have been 21 in the 2,000 years of the Church's history. They quote them. They remind us of them. They reinforce them. Why? Because the Church believes it is the Holy Spirit who speaks through these Ecumenical Councils.

The Second Vatican Council, calls us to 'full, conscious and active participation' in our celebration of the Liturgy (SC14). These words of the Spirit seem to place no limit on our level of participation. It should be 'full'. This call to full participation is reinforced by the other teachings of the Second Vatican Council I quoted to you in last Sunday's weekly message. And it's being reinforced now by the words of Pope Francis:

'The subject acting in the Liturgy is always Christ & His Church together' (DD15)

'The action of the Liturgy belongs to the totality of the faithful united to Christ.' (DD19)

'Everybody doing together the same gesture, everybody speaking together in one voice...'
(DD51)

And did you notice in last Sunday's second reading St Paul calling on everybody to lift up their hands in prayer, giving us a possible insight into how the Liturgy may have been celebrated in the days of the early Church?

So why have limits been placed on the congregation's participation? Why for example do we not all stand with the priest, or lift up our hands with the priest when he lifts up his hands during the Eucharistic Prayer?

If it is the Spirit speaking through the Second Vatican Council, we can imagine that this full participation is what the Church might look like in the future. But the Church moves slowly. It reforms slowly. Its response to the Spirit is a gradual one. We need to be careful not to rush it, but to move with the Church at its natural pace, and not to be too out of step with other parishes. Just as it is of the essence of the Liturgy to be together in our gestures and our voices, so it is of the essence of the Church to have a togetherness also across our parishes, and to move forward together. Be ready in this age of synodality, and with your input, to be a part of this, as well as the words of Pope Francis.



Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, 25 september 2022