



# The Holy See

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**LETTER OF POPE JOHN PAUL II  
TO CARD. FRANCIS ARINZE  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY  
OF THE CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP  
AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS**

*To Cardinal Francis Arinze  
Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship  
and the Discipline of the Sacraments*

1. Venerable Brother, I am pleased to send you my cordial greeting, which I also extend to the Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops and Priests who have gathered for this Congregation's Plenary Assembly. I know that at your meeting you are addressing topics of great interest that also fit well into the context of this special Year of the Eucharist.

I express my affectionate greeting to you all. Some of those who are taking part in the Plenary Assembly have been collaborating with the Dicastery for years, whereas others have only recently been invested with this responsibility. It is wonderful to note not only that the recent appointments have increased the number of members, but also that they have made the Congregation more representative of the Church which has spread on all the continents.

I address my thanks to each one. In particular, I express my gratitude to you, Your Eminence, for your words of affection and the assurance of a special prayer that you sent me on everyone's behalf as well as for the generous dedication with which you direct this Dicastery.

2. At this session you have attentively reviewed the Congregation's work in recent years in accordance with the pastoral plan that I proposed to all the People of God, asking them to become more and more expert in the "art of prayer" (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 32). I am particularly grateful to the Congregation for promptly complying with the instructions in the Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* and the Apostolic Letter *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, paving the way for the Instruction

*Redemptionis Sacramentum* first, and subsequently, for the *Suggestions and Proposals* for the Year of the Eucharist. I hope that these Documents will increase love for the Blessed Sacrament among the members of the Christian community and help them to celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice ever more worthily, in conformity with the liturgical norms and especially with authentic inner participation.

3. In this perspective the topic, *ars celebrandi*, on the agenda of the Plenary Assembly, is of great importance. It should be examined in light of the theological vision of the liturgy as described in the Conciliar Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. The liturgy is an exercise of the priestly office of Christ himself as eternal High Priest of the New Covenant and involves the whole of his mystical Body (cf. Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 7). Christ is especially present in the celebration of the Eucharist, a living representation of the Paschal Mystery. We participate and share in his action in ways in keeping with our human nature, which needs words, signs and rites.

The effectiveness of this action is a fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit but also requires a human response. The *ars celebrandi* [art of celebrating] precisely expresses the capacity of ordained ministers and of the entire assembly, gathered together for the celebration, to bring about and live the meaning of each liturgical action. This "art" is one with the commitment to contemplation and Christian consistence. Through rites and prayers, we must let the Mystery reach and permeate us.

4. Special attention has been paid in particular to the *homily*, which the Council presented as an integral part of the liturgy itself at the service of the Word of God (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 52). It is different in character from ordinary catechesis. Those who preach it have a twofold responsibility: to the Word and to the Assembly. The homily must encourage an encounter as intimate and fruitful as possible between God who speaks and the community members who listen. It is especially important that they do not miss the Sunday Eucharist. In the context of the new evangelization, the homily is a precious, and for many a unique, opportunity for formation.

5. Another aspect the Plenary Meeting focused on was that of *liturgical formation*, a fundamental component in the training of future priests and deacons and of instituted ministers and Religious, as well as a permanent dimension of catechesis for all the faithful. Adequate training programmes in parish communities, associations and ecclesial movements are urgently needed, so that the liturgy may become better known in the richness of its language and be lived to the full. To the extent that they can do this, communities will feel the beneficial influence of the liturgy on both their personal and community life.

6. I encourage your Dicastery, therefore, to persevere, in cordial and trusting collaboration with the Bishops' Conferences and individual Bishops, with the commitment to promoting the liturgy. The liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council has borne abundant fruit, but it is necessary to move on "from renewal to deepening" (Apostolic Letter *Spiritus et Sponsa*, n. 6), so that the liturgy may increasingly mark the lives of individuals and communities, becoming a source of holiness,

communion and missionary dynamism.

The Dicastery of which you are President, Your Eminence, is entrusted with an important task. May the action of the Holy Spirit and the motherly help of Mary make your every effort fruitful. I accompany you with my prayers, as I warmly bless all of you and those who collaborate in the numerous activities of the Dicastery.

*From Gemelli Polyclinic, 3 March 2005*

**IOANNES PAULUS II**

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