

Maxima Redemptionis Nostrae Mysteria: Fifty Years Later (1955–2005)

Fr. Carlo Braga

Part 1

*Editor's Introduction: Although Holy Week is long past, this week concludes with the last piece of damage done by the 1955 reform of it, the suppression of the ancient baptismal rites of [the vigil of Pentecost](#). This seems, therefore, like a good time to present this account of the reform by Fr Carlo Braga, a Vincentian priest and close collaborator of Abp Annibale Bugnini, and a major contributor to the creation of the post-Conciliar Rite. This address was delivered in Italian at the Pontifical University of St Anselmo in Rome on November 17, 2005, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the reform, under the title "Maxima Redemptionis Nostrae Mysteria: 50 Anni Dopo (1955-2005)," published in *Ecclesia Orans* 23 (2006): 11-36. This translation was made by Carlo Schena, to whom we express our deepest gratitude. The text is quite long, and will be presented in four parts.*

Preserving one's own history and "making remembrance" of certain significant dates is natural to every man and in every civil society. It meets the need to re-live one's identity, to strive to keep alive one's past, to reap the teachings that still have to be lived out.

It is with this attitude of spirit that we gather this evening. We commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the reform of Holy Week by Pope Pius XII on November 16, 1955. Some of us lived through this event, and we relive it this evening as part of our history. Many of you are rediscovering it or coming to learn of it, perceiving the significance it had in the life of the Church through our witness. Our gathering will be constructive if we succeed in truly "making remembrance", that is, if we are able to remember the contents of history, hope and commitment of that event, if we can give thanks for it and project those same feelings on to the future. It is an ecclesial action that can and must enrich and perfect our life and the life of the Christian community. The reform of fifty years ago had its applications, then, and its developments, after the Council. It produced good fruits, but it still needs to be deepened and re-lived.

The historical context

On May 28, 1948, only a few months after the publication of *Mediator Dei* (November 20, 1947), Pius XII set up a special "Commission for the General Reform of the Liturgy" at the Historical Section of the Congregation of Rites. This was a bold act which, with marked pastoral and spiritual sensitivity, took up the ferments of renewal and pastoral reflection that were emerging in the Church. From these had already blossomed some innovations in the discipline of the Church: the mitigation of Eucharistic fasting and the possibility of evening Masses,¹ and [a new version of the Psalter](#), also for liturgical use.² The Commission was born silently, had never been officially made public, committed itself to working in silence,³ and had set out on an ambitious project, namely to take up and complete, with the necessary updatings [aggiornamenti], the plans for liturgical reform of Pius X.

¹ Cfr. C. BRAGA - A. BUGNINI, *Documenta ad instaurationem liturgicam spectantia 1903-1963*, CLV-Ed. liturgiche, Rome 2000: Circa Missas vesperti nas et ieiunium eucharisticum in Gallia (1946-47), n°. 1844-1848; Celebratio Missae horis postmeridianis pro Belgio, Ibid, n°. 1849-1851. - N.B. In the following notes, the indication Documenta refers to the volume here indicated.

² Pius XII, *Motu Proprio In cotidianis precibus, De nova psalorum conversione latina*, in *Documenta*, n°. 1787-1791.

³ Some notes on the Commissione Piana can be read in A. BUGNINI, *La riforma liturgica* (Bibliotheca Ephemerides Liturgicae, Subsidia 30), CLV-Ed. liturgiche, Rome, 21997, 23-26 and 903.

Its first appearance occurred on February 9, 1951, with the publication of the decree *Dominicae Resurrectionis*,⁴ which proposed *ad experimentum* the night-time celebration of the Easter Vigil. It was a sensational and significant act: it made the existence of the Commission public, and outlined the criteria that would guide the liturgical reform. This renewal would not limit itself to a mere touching up of existing rubrics and laws, or to a simplification of some minor detail. It began by striking at the very heart of the liturgy: the celebration of the “mother of all vigils”, the central part of the Paschal Mystery.

It seemed as if Pius XII had wished for this in Mediator Dei: “Since (the) bitter sufferings (of Christ) constitute the principal mystery from which our salvation comes, it is in accordance with the requirements of the Catholic faith to place this in its fullest light, since it is like the center of divine worship; indeed, the Eucharistic sacrifice is its daily representation and renewal, and all the sacred minds are closely linked to the cross.”⁵ The outcomes exceeded expectations, and answered the emerging spirit of anticipation. The first celebration of the restored vigil (March 25, 1951) heightened the expectation and desire for reform of all the rites of the Easter triduum of the “dead, buried and risen” Christ, that is, the revision of the Paschal Triduum and of the entire Holy Week. (*Editor’s note: Here we can only note in passing that nothing was actually “restored” about the Easter vigil in 1951, since one cannot restore that which never existed. The Easter vigil was never a night-time celebration in antiquity, although this was mistakenly believed to be the case at the time.*)

These hopes were also bolstered by the multiplying innovations brought forth by the central authority of the Church: the renewal of the permission to celebrate the Easter Vigil (initially for three years, then for a fourth),⁶ the new discipline for the Eucharistic fast and evening Masses (1953),⁷ the simplification of the rubrics of the Missal and the Breviary (1955),⁸ the numerous concessions for bilingual rituals (from 1947 onwards) and for the faculty of proclaiming the readings in the vernacular (from 1955 onwards), albeit after the proclamation in Latin. The long awaited reform of the rites of Holy Week, however, was always in the forefront. In their reports on the celebration of the Easter Vigil, the bishops called for its fulfilment. A few examples: Card. Lienart: “We express our wish that other celebrations, such as those of Palm Sunday and of Good Friday, be restored in the same liturgical and pastoral spirit”. Card. Roncalli voiced the same hope, even outlining a comprehensive picture of the different reforms in the Holy Week celebrations.⁹

The liturgists, too, were insisting on this point in international congresses held in those years. The Congress of Pastoral Liturgy of Lugano (September 14-18, 1953) stated, “Precious fruits have derived from the Easter Vigil, very appropriately restored by the Supreme Pontiff Pius XII. Let all the celebrations of Holy Week be reformed in like manner, in accordance with the pastoral solicitude of the Holy See.”¹⁰

Thus the reform of the entire Holy Week did not come as suddenly as the reform of the Easter Vigil. It was the completion of an already started and much appreciated work. The reform of the Holy Week and that of the Easter Vigil cannot be separated: they constitute an *unicum* that must be read in terms of integration and logical development. The ritual, pastoral and spiritual experience stemming from

⁴ SACRA CONGREGATIO RITUUM, Decretum Dominicae Resurrectionis, in Documenta, no. 2314-2316. Alongside the Decree, the Ordo of the Easter Vigil of 1951 is also given (n°. 2317-2356). In n° 2363-2443 we find the Decree for the prorogation of the Easter Vigil, the Ordinationes and the second edition of the Ordo for the Easter Vigil published in 1952.

⁵ Pius XII, Encyclical Mediator Dei. Cfr. Documenta, n° 2033.

⁶ Cfr. the Decrees of the Congregation for Rites in Documenta, nos. 2366, 2590.

⁷ Pius XII, Motu Proprio Christus Dominus (6 January 1953) and the annexed Instruction of the Holy Office in Documenta, nos. 2469-2520.

⁸ SACRA CONGREGATIO RITUUM, Decretum De rubricis ad simpliciores formam redigendis (23 March 1955), in Documenta, nos. 2593-2649.

⁹ The two quotations are taken from MEMORIA De instauratione liturgica Maioris Hebdomadae (24 and 45). Cfr. note 13.

¹⁰ Partecipazione attiva alla liturgia. Acts of the Third International Conference on Liturgical Studies, Lugano 14-18 September 1953, Centro di liturgia e pastorale, Lugano 1953, 38 (Latin text), 237 (Italian text).

the reform of the Easter Vigil provides the foundation for the ritual, pastoral and spiritual principles of the reform of the entire Holy Week. And it was, we might say, providential that the reform of the Easter Vigil was published first, and that it was *ad experimentum* and optional for four years. This made it possible to gather and evaluate the reactions and to refine the working method.

The history of the reform of Holy Week

Sixteen sessions of the work of the Pian Commission, from January 1950 to November 1955, were devoted to the study of the reform of Holy Week.¹¹

An initial overview was carried out on January 27, 1950. This was only a general outline of the reform of Holy Week proposed in nos. 60-74 of the *Memoria*.¹² In principle, all the proposals were accepted.

The first reform to be approved was that of the Easter Vigil (January 23, 1951), announced shortly before Easter, on February 9, with Easter on March 25.

The issue of Holy Week came back to the Commission on October 18, 1952. Between October and December the new celebrations for Maundy Thursday were defined, and in the first sessions of 1953, those of Good Friday. Notably, the reintroduction of Holy Communion on Good Friday was approved, a decision confirmed by the Pope the following August.

The revision of Palm Sunday was examined in May 1954.

A rather lengthy break followed, as the Pope had asked for the whole issue of Holy Week to be examined by the cardinals at an ordinary meeting of the Congregation of Rites. An illustrative *Positio* had to be prepared.¹³ The ordinary congregation of the Cardinals, held on July 19, 1955, ratified the decisions and the achievements of the Commission.

The Decree promulgating the reform of Holy Week and the pastoral guidelines to help priests understand and organize the celebrations properly were approved between the end of October and the beginning of November 1955. The Decree of Approval was published on November 16.¹⁴ The volume of the *Ordo* includes the decree of approval, dated November 30, 1955.¹⁵ It hit the shelves on January 4 1956. Easter fell on April 1.

At the beginning of February 1957, some *Ordinationes et Declarationes* completed and corrected, with regard to some details, the dispositions of 1955.¹⁶

The session which brought the greatest relief was, without doubt, that of April 6, 1956, when "His Eminence shares the new that several bishops have written to you on the excellent success of the restored Holy Week."

¹¹ The various passages are documented in the Acts of the Commission, as reported by N. GIAMPIETRO in his work *Il Card. Ferdinando Antonelli e gli sviluppi della riforma liturgica dal 1948 al 1970* (Studia anselmiana 121, Analecta liturgica 21), Studia anselmiana, Roma 1998, 274-388. Here I will limit myself to the essential points.

¹² Cfr. C. BRAGA, *La riforma liturgica di Pio XII, Documenti 1: La "Memoria" sulla riforma liturgica* (Bibliotheca Ephemerides Liturgicae, Subsidia 128), CLV-Ed. liturgiche, Roma 2003, 58-76.

¹³ SACRA RITUUM CONGREGATIO, *Sectio historica* (no. 90). *De instauratione liturgica Maioris Hebdomadae, Positio*. Typis polyglottis vaticanis, Vatican City 1954, 1 vol. in 4°, 110 pp. The volume contains: 8 pages of general introduction on the liturgical reform; a first chapter of 30 pages, dedicated to the reform of the Easter Vigil (criteria followed in the reform, successes and difficulties encountered); a second chapter of 18 pages, in which the reasons, the problems and the proposed solutions for the reform of Holy Week are presented. It concludes with a long Appendix of 40 pages, with the main positive and negative reports sent by the bishops to the Congregation with regard to the celebration of the Easter Vigil.

¹⁴ SACRA RITUUM CONGREGATIO, *Decree Maxime Redemptionis nostrae mysteria* (16 November 1955) with the *Instructio*, in *Documenta*, n° 2661-2713.

¹⁵ SACRA RITUUM CONGREGATIO, *Decree of publication and text of the Ordo*, in *Documenta*, n° 2714-2932

¹⁶ SACRA RITUUM CONGREGATIO, *Ordinationes et Declarationes circa Ordinem Hebdomadae Sanctae instauratum*, 1 February 1957, in *Documenta*, no. 3027- 3051. The text of the second edition of the *Ordo* is not given.

This was a rather long and complex journey. There were delays in the discussion of the problems. The Commission got involved, at the same time, in a number of issues related to other areas of the reform. But, as with all Commissions, time was needed between one session and the other, so that ideas could mature and discrepancies could reach a natural settlement in an undisputed and unanimous consensus.

Why a reform of Holy Week?

Confronted with such a demanding and difficult work, we may ask ourselves: why was this reform sought? What was desired? Let us briefly review some of these reasons and some of these hopes.

1. The first reason is offered by the opening words of the decree of promulgation: *Maxima Redemptionis nostrae mysteria*. They echo the words of Pius XII in *Mediator Dei*, which I quoted at the very beginning: the mystery of the Lord's Passion and Resurrection is the principal mystery from which our salvation comes; it is the center of divine worship; it lies at the heart of the whole liturgical year, prepared by the sacred season of Lent, extended in the joy of the fifty days of Easter, and relived every eighth day. Making participation in the rites of the central day of the liturgical year more comprehensible and easier meant to enliven the celebration of the weekly recurrence.

This title doesn't actually originate from a liturgical formulary, despite the numerous terms that refer to it: *sacra, beata, gloriosa, divina mysteria, dominicae passionis mysteria, redemptionis nostrae sacrosancta commercia*, etc. It comes very close to, and perhaps was inspired by, an expression in the introduction to the *Memoriale rituum* published by Benedict XIII: "Praestantiora nostrae redemptionis mysteria". The "praestantiora" comes from the fact that the *Memoriale* covers not only the Easter rites but also others, namely the 2nd of February and Ash Wednesday—important rites, but not as much as the Easter rites.

2. Holy Week is, in its ritual and euchological elements, the fruit of the work of many generations, a masterpiece which constitutes the most precious part of the entire liturgical heritage. However, over the long centuries of its history, some valid elements had been lost, others had crept in which were less in keeping with the nature of the Liturgy, others had become less appropriate, others were no longer able to foster the full participation of the faithful. From time to time, masterpieces – and our Holy Week as well – need a little retouching or even some restoration; a risky task, but one that must be tackled with courage. What is necessary is to have the right means at hand.

Part 2

Editor's Introduction: We continue with the second part of this address by Fr Carlo Braga CM, given in 2005 to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1955 reform of Holy Week, in a translation by Mr Carlo Schena. In 1956, Fr Braga, together with his confrere Fr Bugnini, published a commentary on the then-new Holy Week reform in the Ephemerides Liturgicae, the Vatican's official liturgical bulletin, to which Braga was a regular contributor. It is a breath-takingly dishonest piece of work, in that it offers vast quantities of verbiage about about relatively minor changes, while saying little or nothing about much more substantial ones that radically break with the tradition of the Roman Rite. Fifty years later, the policy is much the same. In this section, Fr Braga offers a great many glittering generalities about "participation" and "being pastoral", but has almost nothing to say about how the reforms in and of themselves are pastoral and bring about participation. This will continue in the next part, his treatment of the individual days of Holy Week.

3. The first item to be addressed in the reform process was the recovery of the *veritas horarum*, i.e. the historical correspondence between the moments of the celebration and the historical events recalled: the Lord's Supper towards the evening of Thursday, the death on the afternoon of Friday, the resurrection at the end of the night between Saturday and Sunday. (*As I noted in a link yesterday, [this is an historical falsehood](#)*.) In ancient times, this correspondence had existed. But in the Middle Ages, for various reasons, mainly for convenience, the celebrations were brought forward to the morning hours, as in the case of the other feast days. This resulted in displacements which, though accepted in other

historical periods when participation in the liturgy had become a formality, caused genuine difficulties for the sensitivity and the spirituality produced by the liturgical movement. This was particularly evident in the morning celebration of the Easter Vigil, with its blessing of the fire for the new light and the many references to the blessed night, carried out while the sun was shining. The joyful ringing of the bells in the middle of the morning or at noon of Saturday marked the end of the Lenten fasting and made the spirit of anticipation for the Resurrection vanish completely.

4. The recovery of the *veritas horarum* was also meant to foster the participation of the whole Christian community in the liturgical action. We are reminded of the celebration of the sacred Triduum rites in deserted churches, with just a handful of people present. Up until the seventeenth century, the days of the Easter Triduum were also mandatory under civil law. It was therefore easy for the community to join in the celebrations on each individual day. However, due to the changed social circumstances, Urban VIII was forced to remove the days of the holy Triduum from the list of holy days of obligation in 1642. Yet in that time and age, it was unthinkable to re-establish the truth of the times in order to provide the faithful with timetables that would allow for a communal participation in the celebrations of these holy days. The pace of work prevailed over spiritual values.

5. To these motivations had to be added, and that with the utmost priority, the pastoral concern for a conscious and active participation of the Christian community. An archaeological reconstruction intended for mere aesthetic purposes or the restoration of ancient forms was not enough. Recovering a few lost elements, preserving parts from the past that were still valid, and introducing something new that could complete the framework of tradition: all these things had to be guided by the pastoral principle of the participation of the Christian community, whose members had to become once again, each to his own degree, the true actors of the celebration and derive from it more abundant fruits of sanctification. This is what the faithful were asking for, particularly those who were more sensitive to the new spirituality that was manifesting itself and fostering the renewal [of Christian life].¹⁷

6. The Commission embraced the earnest aspirations of the People of God and, in tackling the most delicate part of its work, namely the reform of the heart of the liturgical year, showed how a true revision of the liturgy could be achieved in full and scrupulous fidelity to the best liturgical traditions.

What was not psychologically and spiritually possible at the time of Pius V and Urban VIII because of tradition, insufficient spiritual and theological formation, and lack of knowledge of the liturgical sources, was however possible at the time of Pius XII.

The Church was now open to the ferments of renewal and to the new aspirations of society, showing understanding and courage in the face of the challenges of new times. The mindset of the Christian communities was not only willing to accept the reforms, but even demanded them, confident of the spiritual results they would bring. On a scientific level, the Commission had all the necessary technical means at its disposal. The historical, textual and rubrical sources were now at hand, in critical editions drafted with reliable scientific criteria. The past could be read and assessed; it could be clarified and compared with the new realities. The journey of the reform would be neither easy nor quick, but it was possible, and the passion and good will of the scholars [involved] would make it possible. Possibly the authors of the critical editions had dreamed of such a courageous initiative, but had to be content with hope. To see its completion was something reserved for us.

The reform was greeted with very favourable comments. In this sense, the bibliography of liturgical journals is significant. For many of them, it was not possible to publish the document itself or presentations and comments in the last issue of 1955. But the first issues of 1956 were dedicated to

¹⁷ After the reform of the Easter Vigil, the reform of the Holy Triduum became the subject of many conferences. This is evidenced by a lecture given by Fr. G. LOEW at the Theological Week in Linz (July 1953) entitled “La riforma liturgica del Triduum sacrum” and published in the Rivista Liturgica 41 (1954) 118-130. Of course, Fr Loew’s position in the Commissione Piana allowed him to disclose many details in advance, even though he claimed to be speaking on a personal capacity.

preparing the renewed Easter celebrations and all through the year there was a great number of scholarly and pastoral articles.¹⁸ Some magazines devoted special monographic issues to the subject.¹⁹

I have spoken of liturgical journals. A few journals, then widespread among the clergy, both at the end of 1955 and during 1956, gave no space to the question of the new celebrations. The concept of liturgical pastoral ministry had not yet come to animate the general pastoral approach. Times had yet to mature, by means of experience of the celebrations.

The changes in the new Ordo

Let us take a closer look at the changes that the new Ordo has brought into the Roman liturgy. We mentioned that this is not an archaeological effort. However, it could not disregard historical data to evaluate and choose its innovations. We will have to do likewise in our presentation: in order to appreciate the value of certain solutions, we will need to retrace the historical development and the ritual evolutions.²⁰

1. The method of publication is the first innovative element to be found upon opening this liturgical book. The Decree, a juridical document, includes the entire normative (*i.e. rubrical*) section; in addition, however, we find a pastoral guide, designed to help both priests and the faithful understand and celebrate the new rites. Such a procedure had not been followed even for the promulgation of the reformed Easter Vigil.

The purpose of the Instruction is clearly expressed at the very outset: “Whereas the purpose of the new Ordo of Holy Week is to enable the faithful to participate more devoutly and fruitfully in the venerable liturgy of these days ... it is of great importance that this salutary end be fully achieved.” The means of doing so was to be the knowledge and implementation of the Instruction itself. Through it “the transition to the new dispositions is made easier, and the faithful, from their lively participation in the sacred rites, will certainly draw more abundant fruits”.

The Instruction is not a pious exhortation; it is not optional. Its knowledge and application are required: “All those concerned should strive to know and observe the following Instruction” (the Latin text is stronger: “huius Instructionis cognitio et observantia iniungitur.”)

In particular, the bishops are called upon to prepare the priests in the knowledge of the new Ordo, not only from a ritual viewpoint, but also in its liturgical and pastoral sense. Priests are also reminded of their duty to ensure that “the faithful, during Lent, are suitably instructed so that they may properly understand the new Ordo of the Holy Week, in order to partake with understanding and devotion in the sacred celebrations.”

This pastoral exhortation remains valid even for today: Lenten catechesis should aim to prepare the faithful for the Easter celebrations and to grasp all the implications of these celebrations for the life of the believer.

¹⁸ The Rivista liturgica published the text of the documents in the last issue of vol. 42 (1955), with a short note of presentation by Mgr. Carlo Rossi, President of CAL (233-246). In vol. 43 (1956) the Rivista published P.G. LOEW, “La Settimana Santa restaurata e la pastorale liturgica” (79-92), by D. BALBONI, “Teologia ed ascetica nell’Ordo Instauratus Hebdomadae Sanctae” (93-105) and L. ROVIGATTI, “Esperienze e suggerimenti della prima celebrazione della Settimana Santa restaurata” (106-117).

¹⁹ I shall just mention two extensive commentaries published in 1956. The first can be found in Ephemerides Liturgicae 70, fasc. 2-3, edited by A. BUGNINI - C. BRAGA (81-228). It has a historical and pastoral character. This text was published in a separate volume with the title Ordo Hebdomadae Sanctae instauratus (Bibliotheca Ephemerides Liturgicae, Sectio historica 25), published by the Edizioni liturgiche, Rome 1956, 174 pp. The second commentary is that of Maison-Dieu n. 45 (1/1956), rather pastoral in character, with studies by L. BEAUDUIN, P.-M. GY, P. JOUNEL, P. DONCOEUR, L. BOUYER, E. VIALE, B. CAPELLE, I.-H. DALMAIS.

²⁰ The nature of this essay does not allow me to offer detailed documentation for the historical part that will be recalled. I apologise and refer you to the study of which I was the author together with Fr Bugnini, as mentioned in the previous note.

This idea of a pastoral and spiritual Instruction for participation in liturgical celebrations proved to be a positive one. It served as a guide for new documents and new liturgical books; it would be applied and expanded in the Praenotanda of the books of the conciliar reform.

2. Some indications for all of Holy Week

Before going into a detailed examination of the reform of the individual days, it is worth pausing briefly to examine some norms concerning Holy Week as a whole.

a) **Form of the celebration.** In nos. 1 and 2 of the Ordinationes of February 1, 1957, two forms of celebration are envisaged: a so-called “solemn” one for churches where a sufficient number of sacred ministers is available; another referred to as a “simple rite” for churches where there are no sacred ministers. The principle had already been formulated and tested in the second edition of the Ordo of the Easter Vigil, in 1952. The liturgical book shows the norms for the two forms of celebration together: those for the solemn rite in round type, those for the simple rite in italics. The two forms are intended to ensure a dignified celebration, not just where there is an abundance of ministers and means, but also in places with fewer human and material resources. The one condition “absolutely required in order to be able to use the simple rite” is the accurate preparation of the celebrant, the ministers and the various material items – thus the necessary adaptations are provided in order to avoid unbecoming improvisations. This is a wise rule, part of the economy of the dignity of the sacred action.

The novelty lies in the fact that the prescriptions for the two rites are systematically included together in the same liturgical book. Formerly, Benedict XIII had a *Memoriale rituum* published in 1724, i.e. a simple ceremonial for the parish churches of Rome, which Pius VII extended to all dioceses in 1821, to be used at the bishop’s discretion. This reduced ceremonial remained in use until the reforms of Pius XII. It inspired the rubrics of the Ordo. And since there are still many churches that have no abundance of clergy, on February 5, 1957, the Congregation of Rites published a very detailed *Ritus simplex Ordinis Hebdomadae Sanctae instaurati*, intended to replace the *Memoriale* of Benedict XIII. As a sort of completion, ten days later (February 15, 1957) it also published a *Ritus pontificalis* for the same Ordo, replacing the corresponding chapters of the *Cerimoniale* of bishops.

But n. 3 of the Declarationes goes even further. In order to enrich the celebrations according to the simple rite, it provides that, where there is another priest or deacon, these may “suitably fulfil the part of the deacon”, with no need for the parallel figure of the subdeacon. This form was already known in the monastic rites. An interesting possibility, as it opens the way to what the *Institutio generalis* of the Missal of Paul VI will refer to as the *Missa cum diacono*.

b) **Forms of participation.** - According to the Ordo, the presence of the Christian community at the Easter celebrations must express itself in the fullness of forms required by the rites. It must be attentive, conscious, active, and full.

Attention must be ensured by the prior knowledge of the rite achieved through the Lenten catechesis offered by the priests, which in turn presupposes their own preparation. Active participation should implement both the general norms and those specific to certain moments of these celebrations. The visibility of particular gestures of the celebration, detached from the altar and carried out by the sacred ministers while facing the people, is also of significance and influence. Full participation must be ensured by sacramental participation: hence the indication to arrange for the celebration of Confession at opportune times, even before Holy Week.

Among the many details that should have encouraged active participation, I shall dwell briefly on a rubric concerning the listening to the word of God: “(Lectiones) leguntur a lectore.... Celebrans et ministri, clerus et populus sedentes auscultant”. It is normal to listen to a reading while sitting down. The new and most important part refers to the celebrant: he is no longer obliged to read personally, as if he were abstracting himself from the community, what is proclaimed for the whole assembly. This rubric was already in the Ordo of the Easter Vigil. The *Instructio* of 1955 takes it up and specifies that “...the celebrant omits what the deacon, the subdeacon and the reader sing or read” (No. 6). With the Codex rubricarum (no. 473) of John XXIII and the 1962 edition of the Missal, this became a general norm for all

celebrations. A new style of celebration was gradually emerging. Unfortunately, the effectiveness of this new norm lost much of its value as the readings were not allowed to be in the vernacular.

There is a minor inconsistency: the rule has no corresponding application, as would be logical, for the sung parts. It is only on Good Friday that it is said that, while the “sic dicta impropria” are being sung, “celebrans, ministri sacri et ministrantes, ceterique omnes qui adorationem sanctae crucis peregerunt, sedentes auscultant”. No reason is given for this particularity.

Part 3

Editor’s Introduction: We continue with the third part of this address by Fr Carlo Braga CM, given in 2005 to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1955 reform of Holy Week, in a translation by Mr Carlo Schena. Here he begins to discuss the reforms of the individual celebrations. In order to keep each of the four parts to a roughly equal and manageable length, this breaks off after the discussion of the solemn prayers of Good Friday.

3. Palm Sunday. This was the medieval name for this Sunday. It emphasized the most conspicuous element of the day’s liturgy: the blessing of the palms and the procession in honor of Christ the Redeemer.

In the Roman sacramentaries, we find a richer denomination. The reference to the palms is associated with the memory of the Passion: *Dominica in palmis. In passione Domini.* This is a clear reference to the nature of the week which this Sunday begins. The main feature in the liturgy of Rome was the reading of the Passion. Leo the Great used to illuminate it with his discourses.

The origin of the celebration goes back at least to the second half of the 4th century: Egeria mentions it in her travel diary, when describing the celebration in Jerusalem. At mid-afternoon, the Christian community gathered on the Mount of Olives and thence descended in procession to the Anastasis, where the celebration would conclude in the evening with the celebration of the lucernarium and the veneration of the cross.

In the West, the celebration of the palms was already present in the seventh century and was gradually enriched by elements also deriving from the sacred dramas. Characteristic were the dramatized singing of Theodolf’s hymn, *Gloria, laus*, which was first sung at the city gate and then moved to the church door, and the knocking on the door asking it to be opened to welcome the king of glory.

The Middle Ages introduced two innovations that, to some extent, changed the significance of the celebration’s elements.

The most noticeable change involved the blessing of the palms. Following the customs of the time, a kind of “*Missa sicca*” was created, which was preserved up to the Missal of Pius V. (*This is an historical falsehood; the blessing of the Palms is unique in being structured like a Mass.*) It comprised an Introit, a Collect, two readings, an oration to replace the Super Oblata, and the singing of a Preface and a Sanctus. The blessing of the branches followed (with as many as eight prayers, conceived to be interchangeable according to the quality of the branches to be blessed). Then came the distribution of the blessed branches and the conclusion with a prayer to sum up. Then the procession would start (most of the times confined within the church) and, upon returning to the altar, after the procession’s concluding prayer – which broke the unity of the celebration – the Mass ensued, starting again with the singing of the Introit. The Mass included the reading of the Passion according to Matthew.

The solemnity of the blessing endowed the palms with an autonomous “sacramental” value and made them a blessed element in their own right, a sacred, protective object, to be carried in the homes and fields, and made them lose their true relationship with the procession.

The rite was really burdensome, particularly because of the anticipated and undue repetition of parts of the Mass and the multiplication of the blessing formulas. A simplification was rightly called for. The new Ordo preserves the essential lines: an opening hymn, the blessing with a single oration (the last one in the Missal of Pius V), the distribution of the branches, the reading of the Gospel of the Entrance into Jerusalem, to explain the meaning of the procession, the procession itself and then the Mass.

The emphasis is on the procession: it is linked to the principal Mass, thus gathering a considerable number of faithful; it must be done outside the church; it is to be an expression of faith through the singing, even of popular hymns, to Christ the Redeemer.

This is reinforced by the color of the vestments (red for the whole celebration), a sign of royalty and of festivity. The one element that is a little off in the new Ordo is the concluding prayer of the procession, which breaks the unity of the celebration. (In 1956, this element was described by Braga himself, writing together with Fr Bugnini, as a “restoration” of the most authentic Roman tradition, and then suppressed in 1969.) This was perhaps less evident at the time of the reform, when a change of vestments (purple took over) was also prescribed for the Mass.

It was a simplification, achieved with the criteria of agility and effective participation of a community. Evident were the signs of the Church’s glorification of Christ the Redeemer, in view of the Passion, which opened the door to the Easter triumph. The work was agile as all the elements could already be found in the liturgical books of the Roman tradition. It was therefore easy to discern whatever could actually serve to bring about the desired reform.

4. Maundy Thursday. - The heart of the celebrations of this day, devoted, in the context of Easter, to the memory of the institution of the Eucharist, the sacrament of the sacrifice of the cross, is to be found in the Eucharistic celebration, which since ancient times had been carried out in the evening, that is, in the hours when the Lord sat at table with his disciples for the last time. And, in order to represent that supper in an even more sensible manner, when the practice of concelebration had disappeared, a single Eucharist was retained, presided over by the bishop or the presbyter first in dignity, and during which all, priests included, received communion.

This day, however, coincided with the end of the Lenten period. Thus it also marked the conclusion of the two institutions characteristic of this season: the catechumenate for the newcomers to the faith, and the end of public penance for those who needed to be reconciled with the Church. The ancient sacramentaries had framed these two celebratory moments in the framework of two distinct Eucharistic celebrations, which were held in the morning: one for the reconciliation of penitents, and a second, reserved by its nature to the cathedral church, designated for the consecration of chrism and the blessing of the Oils, above all that of the catechumens, with its Paschal projection.

These two celebrations did not involve the whole community. The community was called together, as such, for the Mass in *Cena Domini*, towards evening.

Changes to this discipline came through the natural evolution of things. The Mass for the Reconciliation of Penitents was dropped as the discipline of public penance fell. The progressive anticipation of the Mass in *Cena Domini* to the morning hours ended up merging the consecration of the Chrism and the remembrance of the Lord’s Supper into a single celebration, making of the blessing of the Oils a burdensome appendix to the Mass in *Cena Domini*. (*This statement is historically false. The Chrism Mass dropped out of use long before it became the general custom to celebrate the Mass of the Lord’s Supper in the morning.*) It remained, however, the sole Eucharistic celebration of the community, in which all, priests included, received communion.

The major practical difficulty with this liturgical arrangement was that priests were unable to celebrate on the very day on which the Church also commemorated the institution of the priesthood. Three solutions were proposed: the possibility of concelebrating sacramentally, the possibility of celebrating individually (many had, for a variety of reasons, the privilege of doing so), and the possibility of a “ritual” concelebration, in which the priests, standing in choir and clothed in priestly vestments, would say all the parts of the Mass, minus the words of institution, and would then receive Eucharistic communion from the one presiding over the celebration.

How did the reform work through this?

The key issue was to restore the nature of the Mass in *Cena Domini* as the proper and central celebration of the day and of the community, removing the insertions of the blessing of the oils. This wasn’t difficult: all the elements could remain in their traditional form. It was enough to restore the afternoon schedule. And so it was done, allowing for the participation of the whole community.

As for the participation of the priests, sacramental concelebration did not seem feasible (the mentality, even among some influential members of the Commission, was not yet prepared), a purely “ritual” concelebration was ruled out, and even more so an individual celebration, which would have erased the communal value of the Mass in *Cena Domini*. Indeed, the respective dicasteries of the Holy See should have been asked not to grant further privileges in this regard. What was left was a celebration in which the presbyters would take part in choir, wearing stoles, and then receive communion like the whole assembly.

In the Mass, the *Mandatum* was restored as a complementary yet proper – though not obligatory (*ubi ratio pastoralis id suadeat*) – part of the liturgy. Originally an act of the liturgy of the day, it had gradually passed into monastic or chapter uses, but separate from the Mass of the day. It did appear as a liturgical act in the Missal of Pius V and in the *Cerimoniale* of bishops, but as a celebration in its own right, consisting of the reading of chapter 13 of John, the singing of a set of antiphons with the hymn *Ubi caritas* and a concluding prayer. Under the new *Ordo* the rite was integrated into the Mass, preceded by its explanation in the homily. Unfortunately, the prayers and the final oration, which were retained, continued to make it appear as a separate rite, breaking the unity of the celebration.

The *Instructio* recommends that the celebration of the *Mandatum* lead the community to make it an occasion for abundant works of Christian charity.

Another restored element was the *Missa chrismatis* for the blessing of the oils. The eucharological component was retrieved from the ancient sacramentaries, and included the proper preface, extant as such in the sacramentaries, then merged with the prayer of consecration of the chrism when this was included in the Mass in *Cena Domini*. This was an important rite for the particular church, a sign of communion with the bishop on the part of the whole community and above all of the presbyters. And yet, strangely enough, neither in the *Instructio* of 1955, nor in the *Ordinationes* of 1957, nor in the *Ordo* itself, is there a single word of presentation that underlines its importance and details how it is carried out. There are but two specifications: the first concerns its celebration in the morning, after Terce, and the second, perhaps out of fear that this would prejudice participation in the evening Mass: “In hac Missa communionem distribuere non licet.” (*In this Mass it is not permitted to distribute Communion.*)

The traditional visit to the “Sepulchres”, with its somewhat superstitious overtones, could pose some difficulties for the celebration of Mass in *Cena Domini* in the evening hours. The “Sepulchre” was popularly referred to as the place where the Eucharist was reposed for communion on the following day. Like other rites, this reposition has undergone its own evolution: the Eucharist, initially conserved under the two species, was then kept only under the species of bread, at first for the whole community, and then only for communion by the priest presiding over the liturgical action on Friday. It was always conserved in a closed tabernacle. This is what inspired some allegorical authors of the Middle Ages to the idea of the deposition of the Lord in the tomb. This was welcomed by the people’s piety, and it still is, to some extent, at least in popular language. The term “Sepulchre” is used in the *Memoriale rituum* of Benedict XIII (*sacellum Sepulcri*) and was sanctioned by a decree of the Congregation of Rites in 1896 (no. 3939): the Altar of Reposition represents both the burial of the Lord and the institution of the Eucharist!

The new rite of Holy Thursday highlights the reposition of the Eucharist and its adoration, but restores the various elements to their proper meaning. The pastoral *Instructio* recommends two things in this regard:

“The faithful should be instructed in the love with which Christ our Lord, on the day before he suffered, instituted the most holy Eucharist, sacrifice and sacrament, perpetual remembrance of his passion, to be perpetually celebrated by priests.”

“The faithful are likewise invited to make a fitting adoration of the Most Holy Sacrament after the Mass in *Cena Domini*” (n. I 2b)... “at least until midnight, when, that is, the memory of the institution of the Most Holy Eucharist is replaced by the memory of the Lord’s Passion and Death” (II 10).

5. Good Friday. The joyful solemnity of the day that recalled the institution of the Eucharist, the sacrament of the Lord’s sacrifice, left to us as a sign of his boundless love, is superseded, in the celebration of the paschal mystery, by the austere solemnity of Good Friday with its remembrance of the

bridegroom being taken away. This is why the Church withdraws into the intimate silence of the severity of the Good Friday rites, recalling the suffering and hope of the glorious cross. This is the day that Ambrose calls “dies amaritudinis”, yet Tertullian had already called “Dies paschatis.”

The Good Friday liturgy is characterized, in the Roman rite, by the absence of any celebration of the Eucharist, the memorial of the sacrifice, as the liturgy is fond of recalling on that very day the selfsame sacrifice offered on the cross. And the rites are still those of the early centuries of the Church, centered on the adoration of the cross, the blessed cross, the origin of that salvation contained in the sacred mysteries.

Here is how the 1955 *Instructio* lists and proposes the ritual elements and the spiritual features of the celebration of this day: “The faithful are to be prepared to understand the unique function of this day, in which, after the sacred readings and prayers, the Passion of our Lord is solemnly read, prayers are offered for the needs of the whole Church and of the human race, and then the whole Christian family, clergy and people, devoutly adore the Holy Cross, the trophy of our redemption; finally, according to the rubrics of the new Ordo, and as has been the custom for many centuries, all those who wish and are properly disposed may receive Holy Communion, all the more so that, by devoutly receiving the body of the Lord, who died for all on this day, they may perceive the fruits of redemption more abundantly.” (I 2c)

The reform has been respectful of rituals from a holy tradition. The changes were few, though significant. [*Editor: This is so manifest a falsehood that it is very difficult to see how Fr Braga could have said this in good faith. Not only is the ceremony of three of the four parts very considerably changed; none of the changes have any precedent in tradition.*]

On the other hand, the corpus of the “great orations” or “orationes sollemnes” has undergone some adjustments. Their proclamation has been returned to the logical execution of the different elements: first the introduction (still up to the celebrant), then a pause for silence after the deacon’s invitation to kneel (Flectamus genua), and finally the proclamation of the collect by the celebrant.

The formulary of prayer for the civil authorities has been revised, as had already been done in the revision of the *Exsultet* of Easter night. The new text begs for the help of God’s spirit for all who have governing responsibilities, that through them their homeland may enjoy freedom of religion and tranquility. In the Missal of Paul VI the text will undergo new refinements, in a broader vision, as inspired by *Gaudium et spes*.

However, there remained unchanged two expressions which, even then, created difficulties, not only of a psychological nature; namely, in the prayer for the conversion of the Jews. The problem had been raised during the work of the Commission, but it had not deemed necessary to change the traditional wording, while recognizing the psychological difficulties. A proper catechesis should have been sufficient to explain the exact meaning of the expression. A more exact formula, in a new ecumenical vision, was to be drafted by the Missal of Paul VI. Unchanged was also the text of the prayer *Pro unitate Ecclesiae*. The sensibility in the field of ecumenism ushered in by Vatican II was still missing.

A note: the renewed scheme of the Good Friday Ordo highlights the prayer of the faithful and gives hope for its restoration, regardless of the concrete forms, which were yet to be studied. However, it does not underline that it belongs to the liturgy of the word, as an echo and conclusion to it. Indeed, it is designated as a second part of the celebration, apart and separate from the liturgy of the word. This separation is made even more evident by the change of vestments: the celebrant wears the cope, whereas during the Liturgy of the Word he only wore the stole. This is just one of the few minor inaccuracies.

Part 4

Editor’s Introduction: This is the last of the four parts of an address by Fr Carlo Braga CM, given in 2005 to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1955 reform of Holy Week, in a translation by Mr Carlo Schena. The first three were published earlier this week: [part one](#), [part two](#), [part three](#). In order to keep each section to a roughly equal and manageable length, it was necessary to break his discussion of Good Friday off in the middle: here he resumes with the adoration of the Cross.

In keeping with the general tenor of his discourse, this part is also filled with important-sounding vaguery, some historical excurses, and a good deal of verbiage about fairly trivial matters such as the definition of the “Triduum” (Thursday to Saturday, or Friday to Sunday?), while almost entirely avoiding any substantive discussion of the changes themselves. I hope to write a more extensive commentary on this whole speech in the coming week.

However, on one point he is absolutely clear: Fr Braga, who was a close collaborator of Fr Bugnini, has no doubt whatsoever that the 1955 reform was the beginning of the process that would culminate in the creation of the post-Conciliar rite. “Its principles, even within their limits, continue to be valid, and we find them, completed and updated, at the basis of the current liturgical books renewed by the post-conciliar reform...” And in this regard, he was, for once, entirely honest.

The second part of the celebration (third according to the Ordo) concerns the adoration of the cross. This is the heart of the celebration on this day. The rite originated in Jerusalem, where it was possible to venerate the true relics of the cross, and was imitated by other churches possessing some of the same relics. We find this rite in Rome already in the fifth century, under influence of the Eastern liturgies. It gradually spread to other churches and, where there were no authentic relics, a simple wooden cross was used instead.

In Jerusalem, the adoration was held on Golgotha. Egeria recalls that the community gathered in the early morning. Before the bishop, sitting on the cathedra, was placed a table covered in a white cloth where the silver reliquary with the relics of the cross and the titulus was brought. Everyone would then walk past to venerate them. The bishop and deacons would make sure that no one touched them, lest someone remove some fragment. The whole rite took place in silence, with no singing and no readings: another celebration followed at a later hour.

In Rome, perhaps as early as the 7th century, the adoration of the relics of the cross took place in the church of the Holy Cross ‘in Jerusalem’, where the pope, together with the clergy, solemnly carried the holy relics in procession from the Lateran, walking barefoot and carrying a thurible. Initially it was a very simple rite of veneration, with no accompanying liturgical celebration. This gradually took shape until, in the tenth century, all the elements that remain to this day can be found. The *Ordo instauratus* introduced no innovations in the rite and chants found in Pius V’s Missal. A curiosity: the rubric that describes the sequence of the procession of the faithful approaching the cross indicates “*primum viri deinde mulieres.*” (First men, then women.)

In large congregations, individual adoration of the cross would have caused difficulties in terms of the long time it would require. The solution was found in the use of several crosses, spread out in different spots of the church. The clash between this utilitarian solution and the meaning of the rite is evident. The 1957 *Ordinationes* provided a solution (*the worst possible one*) in collective adoration. “The celebrant, after the adoration of the clergy, if any, and of the ministrants, shall receive the holy cross from the hands of the ministrants and, from the altar predella, having invited the people with brief words to adore the holy cross, shall present it, raised up, for a brief and silent adoration by the faithful.” (IV 17)

The real innovation of the Good Friday reform was the introduction of the Eucharistic communion of all participants as the final part of the celebration. In the more ancient tradition, Good Friday was devoted to the memory of the bloody sacrifice made by the Lord on the cross on that day. Thus the community abstained from the celebration of the Eucharist as well as from communion of the presanctified, so much so that Innocent I could write to Decentius of Gubbio: “*Traditio Ecclesiae habet biduo isto sacramenta penitus non celebrari.*” (“The tradition of the Church has it that on these two days, the sacraments are not celebrated at all.” PL 20, 555). For Rome, the first document to provide for the communion of the faithful dates back to the seventh century. In the papal liturgy, however, no one, not even the pope, communicated; the faithful could do so, but only in other churches of the city, the so-called *tituli*. (cfr. Gelasian Sacramentary) By contrast, in the 9th-10th century, communion on Good Friday was a precept. It would be the 12th century crisis in Eucharistic piety to make communion optional until, at the end of that century, the Ordo suburbicarius would establish that “*communicat solus pontifex sine ministris*”. And this norm was to flow into subsequent liturgical books until the Missal of Pius V.

However, despite explicit prohibitions by the Holy See, the practice of communion of the faithful was preserved in the tradition of some monasteries and dioceses.

The Commission for the reform discussed at length the convenience of restoring communion of the faithful on Good Friday. While in favour, they presented the question to the pope, and Pius XII answered that there did not seem to him to be any insurmountable difficulties. This was not merely an act of devotion, but a way of emphasizing the proclamation of the Lord's death, not only through the faith expressed in the adoration of the cross, but also through participation in the sacrament of the Lord's death (cfr. 1 Cor 11, 26).

Now that the fundamental questions had been settled, what remained to be structured was the rite to be used. It was not possible to maintain the existing rite, nor was it possible to merely incorporate the rite of communion outside of Mass. The contribution of different traditions had made this rite a sort of Mass, the so-called "Mass of the Presanctified", which included the offertory elements of the Eucharistic celebration, i.e. the preparation of the chalice, the incensing of the "oblates", the lavabo, the *Orate, fratres*. Then the Pater and its embolism; the fractioning of the bread was preceded by an elevation of the host; the immixtio was performed without any formula, "nisi forte (sacerdos) aliquid secrete dicere voluerit", one pontifical specifies, while another clarifies its significance: "Sanctificatur autem vinum non consecratum per sanctificatum panem". This was followed by the priest's communion and the ablutions of the chalice; then the assembly dissolved in silence, with no concluding formula.

The *Ordo instauratus* stuck to the truth of signs. First of all, it eliminated the offertory elements; there is no use of the chalice; it begins immediately with the *Pater* and its embolism, followed by the rite of communion with the confession and absolution as in a regular Mass. To conclude, three prayers are taken from the Gelasian and Verona (i.e. *Leonine, so-called*) Sacramentaries, but without any indication of their genre. Thus, the one that is an *oratio super populum*, which should be the last, comes first; the other two are clearly additional texts of prayer after communion.

The linearity and severity of the primitive tradition of the Good Friday rites are preserved. (*This is blatantly false on many different levels, the most notable being the comical element introduced into the rite by requiring the clergy to change their clothes three times, and element which was happily abolished from the Novus Ordo.*) Added is the sacramental act of communion, a sign of full participation in the mystery of the body and blood of the Lord immolated for us.

6. Easter vigil – I won't dwell on this chapter. The reform of the Easter Vigil belongs to a different moment of the reform of Holy Week: it inaugurated it; it was the ram's head that pierced into the fortress of our by then static liturgy; with the gradual running-in it carried out since 1951 it eased the advancement of the liturgical reform of the whole week. By the time the reform of the Easter triduum came into force, it had already been celebrated for the sixth time. However, it had not been substantially modified. Some *Ordinationes*, added in 1952, had merely specified some juridical issues, i.e. Eucharistic fast, the time of the celebration, the connection with other forms of popular piety. It was in this form that it entered the *Ordo Hebdomadae Sanctae instauratus*, which, in the *Instructio*, reserves for it a fairly large space of pastoral and spiritual context. After explaining the meaning and value of the liturgical silence of Holy Saturday, it refers to the various moments and elements of the celebration to remind how "the purpose of the vigil is to demonstrate and liturgically recall how our life of grace has flowed from the Lord's death". With the Triduum reform, the vigil no longer remained isolated, even in the unique importance of its nature, but was organically linked to the rites that precede it, and which it crowns.

The problem remained, and was left unclear – even in the *Ordo* of Holy Week – of the extent of the Easter triduum. Traditionally, in the liturgical books prior to the reform, it embraced the day of Thursday, with the sacramental anticipation of the mystery of the cross; Friday, with the memory of the Lord's passion and death; and the morning of Holy Saturday, with the glory of the resurrection. On the other hand, the decree *Maxima redemptionis nostrae mysteria* refers to the "triduum of Christ, dead, buried and resurrected" (St Augustine), thus suggesting Friday (death), Saturday (burial) and Sunday (resurrection). But it does not seem that the *Ordo* of Holy Week had fully grasped this dimension. In fact, it retained the Easter celebration within the three traditional days, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, and

while restoring to Saturday the content of the expectation of the Resurrection, it continued to consider the Easter Vigil a part of Saturday, as if its conclusion. The same had been done by the Ordo of the Easter Vigil, whose title was *Ordo sabbati sancti, quando vigilia paschalis instaurata peragitur*, and not just *Ordo vigiliae paschalis instauratae*. The Sunday of the Resurrection was indeed part of the *tempus paschatis*, but did not belong to the triduum, which ended with the celebration of the vigil. A first correction was introduced by the 1962 Missal, which, while maintaining the Easter Vigil in the context of Holy Saturday, included, before the Mass, the indication “Tempus Paschatis”. Yet in this way the Easter Vigil was split into two parts belonging to different liturgical seasons. The definitive clarification would come with Paul VI’s reform of the calendar: Maundy Thursday belongs to Lent; “the Easter triduum of the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord begins with the Mass of the Lord’s Supper, has its fulcrum in the Easter Vigil, and ends with Vespers on the Sunday of the Resurrection” (n. 19). Small but significant corrections that arise from experience.

A concluding general overview

It has been written that the reform of Holy Week was “the most important act in the history of liturgy, from St Pius V to the present day.” We did appreciate this, as we revisited the various parts of the *Ordo Hebdomadae Sanctae instauratus*. We have highlighted the restored or new elements introduced by the reform, illustrating them with numerous references to their history and their topicality. This document is now fifty years old. It is no longer new; on the contrary, it has been revised, corrected and improved. We read it today with a different gaze and heart from those who read it fifty years ago. Let us not stop at the minor flaws: “let us make remembrance of it”, as I noted at the beginning. Its principles, even within their limits, continue to be valid, and we find them, completed and updated, at the basis of the current liturgical books renewed by the post-conciliar reform, and they still influence our pastoral action and our spirituality in living the mystery of Easter. For this, we must give thanks to God who inspired them to the Church half a century ago; for they created a soil in which true liturgical pastoral care and Christian life have grown and borne fruit; and for they have strengthened the foundations of the liturgical renewal we are experiencing today. This is why today we rejoice in reaping their fruits, while acknowledging that the path they marked out was not yet complete.

In conclusion, I would like to return to the fundamental aspect, both in principle and in implementation, of the reform of Holy Week made fifty years ago: its pastoral and spiritual nature. The decree of promulgation states: “The rites of Holy Week not only have a special dignity (because they celebrate the *maxima redemptionis nostrae mysteria*), but they also possess a singular sacramental power and efficacy to nourish Christian life.”

I can hear in these words of the Decree an echo of the teaching of Pius XII in *Mediator Dei* and of Pius X in his *Motu Proprio Tra le sollecitudini*. Pius XII insisted on a shift from a view of the liturgy as an external rite, a ceremony, an observance of rubrical laws, to an understanding of it as a “memorial”, the action of Christ and of the Church, capable of making present and communicating salvation. And Pius X had taught that conscious and full participation in the liturgy is “the first and indispensable source from which Christians can draw a truly Christian spirit.” We may add: above all in the celebration of the greatest mysteries of the Redemption.

All this urges that liturgical pastoral care see and bring live the liturgical year in its fullness, as well as in the hierarchy of its times and values. The celebration of Easter, by its very nature, is the center of the liturgical year; it has its radiation and projection in Sunday, the Easter of the week, throughout the year. On Sundays, the Church relives the paschal sacraments, especially the memorial of the Lord, and projects them into the life of the Christian.

Liturgical pastoral care must have as its specific aim to incorporate into the life and doctrine of the Christian the fulfilment of the paschal mystery, made *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*.

Let us not forget how the reform of Holy Week wanted to initiate the Christian community into a conscious, devout, active and full participation in the liturgical celebration. It simplified the rites, it wanted the assembly to be at the center of the sacred action by seeing, listening, responding, singing.

They were the beginning of a journey dreamed of by the liturgical movement and that the liturgical reform was then beginning to achieve.

Above all, let us not forget that these beginnings are to be placed among the first stones of a road which, starting from the rediscovery of the *Maxima redemptionis nostrae mysteria*, led us to the liturgy as “culmen et fons” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 10) of the Church’s life and pastoral action.