

EXTRAORDINARY CONSISTORY  
(January 7-8, 2026)

*Liturgy: careful theological, historical, and pastoral reflection “that sound tradition may be retained, and yet the way remain open to legitimate progress” (SC 23).*

## LITURGY

Card. Arthur Roche

1. In the life of the Church, the Liturgy has always undergone reforms. From the *Didachè* to the *Traditio Apostolica*; from the use of Greek to that of Latin; from the *libelli precum* to the *Sacramentaries* and the *Ordines*; from the *Pontificals* to the Franco-Germanic reforms; from the *Liturgia secundum usum romanæ curiæ* to the Tridentine reform; from the partial post-Tridentine reforms to the general reform of the Second Vatican Council. The history of the Liturgy, we might say, is the history of its continuous ‘reforming’ in a process of organic development.

2. Saint Pius V, in facing the reform of the liturgical books in observance of the mandate of the Council of Trent (cf. *Session XXV, General Decree*, chap. XXI), was moved by the will to preserve the unity of the Church. The bull *Quo primum* (14 July 1570), with which was promulgated the *Roman Missal*, affirms that “as in the Church of God there is only one way of reciting the psalms, so there ought to be only one rite for celebrating the Mass” (*cum unum in Ecclesia Dei psallendi modum, unum Missae celebrandae ritum esse maxime deceat*).

3. The need to reform the Liturgy is strictly tied to the ritual component, through which – *per ritus et preces* (SC 48) – we participate in the paschal mystery: the rite is in itself characterised by cultural elements that change in time and places.

4. Besides, since “Tradition is not the transmission of things or words, a collection of dead things” but “the living river that links us to the origins, the living river in which the origins are ever present” (BENEDICT XVI *General Audience*, 26 April 2006), we can certainly affirm that the reform of the Liturgy wanted by the Second Vatican Council is not only in full sympathy with the true meaning of Tradition, but constitutes a singular way of putting itself at the service of the Tradition, because the latter is like a *great river that leads us to the gates of eternity*. (*ibid.*).

5. In this dynamic vision, “maintaining solid tradition” and “opening the way to legitimate progress” (SC 23) cannot be understood as two separable actions: without a “legitimate progress” the tradition would be reduced to a “collection of dead things” not always all healthy; without the “sound tradition” progress risks becoming a pathological search for novelty, that cannot generate life, like a river whose path is blocked separating it from its sources.

6. In the discourse to the participants in the Plenary of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (8 February 2024), Pope Francis expressed himself thus:

“Sixty years on from the promulgation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the words we read in its introduction, with which the Fathers declared the Council’s purpose, do not cease to enthuse. They are objectives that describe a precise desire to reform the Church in her fundamental dimensions: to make the Christian life of the faithful grow more and more every day; to adapt more suitably to the needs of our own times those institutions which are subject to change; to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ; to reinvigorate that which serves to call all to the bosom of the Church

(cf. *SC* 1). It is a task of spiritual, pastoral, ecumenical, and missionary renewal. And in order to accomplish it, the Council Fathers knew where they had to begin, they knew there were particularly cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the liturgy" (*Ibid.*). It is like saying: "without liturgical reform, there is no reform of the Church."

7. The liturgical Reform was elaborated on the basis of "accurate theological, historical and pastoral investigation" (*SC* 23). Its scope was to render more full the participation in the celebration of the Paschal Mystery for a renewal of the Church, the People of God, the Mystical Body of Christ (see *LG* chapters I-II), perfecting the faithful in unity with God and among themselves (cf. *SC* 48). Only from the salvific experience of the celebration of Easter, the Church rediscovers and relaunches the missionary mandate of the Risen Lord (cf. Mt 28, 19-20) and becomes in a world torn by discord, a leaven of unity.

8. We ought to also recognize that the application of the Reform suffered and continues to suffer from a lack of formation, and this urgency of addressing, beginning with Seminars to "bring to life the kind of formation of the faithful and ministry of pastors that will have their summit and source in the liturgy (Instruction *Inter oecumenici*, 26 September 1964, 5)

9. The primary good of the unity of the Church is not achieved by freezing division but by finding ourselves in the sharing of what cannot but be shared, as Pope Francis said in *Desiderio desideravi* 61: "We are called continually to rediscover the richness of the general principles exposed in the first numbers of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, grasping the intimate bond between this first of the Council's constitutions and all the others. For this reason we cannot go back to that ritual form which the Council fathers, *cum Petro et sub Petro*, felt the need to reform, approving, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and following their conscience as pastors, the principles from which was born the reform. The holy pontiffs St. Paul VI and St. John Paul II, approving the reformed liturgical books *ex decreto Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II*, have guaranteed the fidelity of the reform of the Council. For this reason I wrote *Traditionis custodes*, so that the Church may lift up, in the variety of so many languages, *one and the same prayer* capable of expressing her unity. [Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Missale Romanum* (3 April 1969) in *AAS* 61 (1969) 222]. As I have already written, I intend that this unity be re-established in the whole Church of the Roman Rite."

10. The use of liturgical books that the Council sought to reform was, from St. John Paul II to Francis, a concession that in no way envisaged their promotion. Pope Francis—while granting, in accordance with *Traditionis Custodes*, the use of the 1962 *Missale Romanum*—pointed the way to unity in the use of the liturgical books promulgated by the holy Popes Paul VI and John Paul II, in accordance with the decrees of the Second Vatican Council, the sole expression of the *lex orandi* of the Roman Rite.

11. Pope Francis summarised the issue as follows (*Desiderio desideravi* 31):

" [...] If the liturgy is 'the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed, and at the same time the font from which all her power flows,' (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 10), well then, we can understand what is at stake in the liturgical question. It would be trivial to read the tensions, unfortunately present around the celebration, as a simple divergence between different tastes concerning a particular ritual form. The problematic is primarily ecclesiological. I do not see how it is possible to say that one recognizes the validity of the Council — though it amazes me that a Catholic might presume not to do so — and at the same time not accept the liturgical reform born out of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, a document that expresses the reality of the Liturgy intimately joined to the vision of Church so admirably described in *Lumen gentium*. [...]"

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