

**HOMILY for Mass at Westminster Cathedral on June 14<sup>th</sup> 2008**

*In medio ecclesiae aperuit os ejus: et implevit eum Dominus spiritu sapientiae et intellectus: stolam gloriae induit eum.*

In the midst of the Church he opened his mouth and the Lord filled him with the spirit of wisdom and understanding. He clothed him with a robe of glory.

Reverend Monsignori and Fathers, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am very pleased to be able to celebrate the feast of St. Basil the Great with you in this magnificent Cathedral dedicated to the Most Precious Blood of Christ. My gratitude goes to His Eminence Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor for his kindness in welcoming me to celebrate this Pontifical Mass in the extraordinary form of the Roman Rite and to the Latin Mass Society for having made this possible.

Saint Basil, the known Father of the Church, is a figure from one of the most crucial periods in the Church's bi-millennial history, a bishop and father of eastern monasticism, a man equally venerated in both the Christian East and West. Our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI in his general audience address of 4 July 2007 said of him: "He was an important Bishop in the fourth century to whom the entire Church of the East, and likewise the Church of the West, looks with admiration because

of the holiness of his life, the excellence of his teaching and the harmonious synthesis of his speculative and practical gifts.”

The Holy Father, quoting from *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and from Saint Gregory Nazianzus, said:

Aware that ‘the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed’, and ‘also the fount from which all her power flows’ (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 10), and in spite of his constant concern to do charitable acts which is the hallmark of faith, Basil was also a wise ‘liturgical reformer’ (cf. Gregory Nazianzus, *Oratio* 43, 34 *in laudem Basili: PG* 36, 541c).

Thus it seems particularly appropriate for us to celebrate his memory today in this cathedral, so evocative of Byzantium, with the Pontifical Mass in the extraordinary form of the Roman Rite for Saint Basil is a saint who transcends any narrow “provincialism” and belongs to the entire Church. The Holy Father tells us that Saint Basil the Great was also “a wise ‘liturgical reformer’”, a bishop who was ready to adapt so that his flock could better integrate the liturgy into their lives.

My dear brothers and sisters, I know that you are here because you want to integrate the Church’s liturgy into your lives especially through the celebration of the extraordinary form of the Mass. I am aware that

over the years the Latin Mass Society has been promoting the celebration of the *usus antiquior* in all of the dioceses of England and Wales in obedient cooperation with your Bishops and in loyalty to the Vicar of Christ.

The Holy See is mindful of your love of the extraordinary form. The recent Motu Proprio is one of the principal ways that our Holy Father Pope Benedict wishes to encourage you and to extend and facilitate opportunities for the celebration of the Mass according to the Missal of 1962, promulgated by his predecessor, Blessed Pope John XXIII. My visit today and my celebration of this Pontifical Mass in the classical Roman Rite is an indication of my personal support for your worthy aims and of the desire also of the Holy See to identify with them. It is also intended to encourage a greater understanding of the new situation that has come about in the pastoral provision for the extraordinary form of the Roman Rite. As Pope Benedict has written in his letter to the Bishops, which accompanied the Motu Proprio: “the two Forms of the usage of the Roman Rite can be mutually enriching” and I sincerely hope that your love for the classical form of the Roman Rite will never be translated into polemics against the ordinary form of the same rite and will be open to any subsequent directions of the Holy See for its celebration.

Indeed the object of the sacred liturgy of the Mass is to re-live in every celebration of the Mass, however solemn or humble, the sacrifice which Jesus offers to the Father. As he renews the offering of himself, we are invited to join the offering of ourselves with him. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts this very succinctly:

The Church which is the Body of Christ participates in the offering of her Head. With him, she herself is offered whole and entire. She unites herself to his intercession with the Father for all men. In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value. Christ's sacrifice present on the altar makes it possible for all generations of Christians to be united with his offering (*CCC* #1368).

This needs to be the fundamental orientation of all Catholics at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. All of us, priests and faithful, are called to unite ourselves and our sufferings to the offering of Christ. This is the most fundamental dimension of "active participation" in the Mass in any recognized rite of the Catholic Church.

Is this not precisely the message of today's Gospel?

"Whoever does not take up his cross and come after me

cannot be my disciple” (Lk. 14:27). The Mass in its simplest or most solemn form is always an invitation for us to unite ourselves with the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary and sacrifice, by definition, always costs. Without the discomforts, pains and the sufferings of this earthly life – physical mental, moral, emotional, spiritual – willingly offered to the Father in union with Christ, we are not fully and actively participating in the Mass. And, indeed, the way that we live the Mass is to unite ourselves with the holy sacrifice in all that we do throughout the day.

As we honour his memory in the Mass of today, may we also ask him to aid us. May his prayers support us and teach us that liturgical renewal is primarily about the constant work of interior conversion and learning how to unite ourselves with the sacrifice of Jesus *ad utilitatem quoque nostram totiusque Ecclesiae suae sanctae* – for our good and the good of all his holy Church.