

Participating Fully, Consciously and Actively in the Mass

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At a typical Sunday mass in your parish, people will make responses in the dialogues together. They will stand, sit and kneel together. They will sing together. They will even observe silence together. They did many of these things prior to the Second Vatican Council, but not all. Perhaps the greatest exception was the dialogues, such as all the places when the priest or deacon says “The Lord be with you,” or the many times that the people simply say the word “Amen”. Prior to the council, as the priest introduced each dialogue, ministers in the sanctuary made the response. People were aware of the dialogues, but they did not voice their participation in them. They prayed very well. They were not mere observers of the mass. But once they started responding to the dialogues, and especially in their own language, the celebration of the eucharist became more vibrant due to the active participation of the people.

We have just celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, known principally for its liturgical renewal, of which the crowning jewel has been the active participation of the people. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy expressed the principal of participation in paragraph 14:

Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations [*ad plenam illam, consciam atque actuosam liturgicarum celebrationum participationem*] which is demanded by the nature of the liturgy itself, and to which the Christian people, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people” (1 Peter 2:9; cf. 4-5) have a right and obligation by reason of their baptism.

The Council did not coin the term “active participation.” It first appeared in the introduction of Pope Pius X’s 1903 Motu Proprio on Sacred Music, *Tra le sollecitudini*:

Filled as We are with a most ardent desire to see the true Christian spirit flourish in every respect and be preserved by all the faithful, We deem it necessary to provide before anything else for the sanctity and dignity of the temple, in which the faithful assemble for no other object than that of acquiring this spirit from its foremost and indispensable font, which is the active participation [*partecipazione attiva*] in the most holy mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church.

Later (3), he sounds the theme again in reference to singing chant:

Special efforts are to be made to restore the use of the Gregorian Chant by the people, so that the faithful may again take a more active part [*parte più attiva*] in the ecclesiastical offices, as was the case in ancient times.

It seems that Pius was promoting three different types of active participation. First he mentions “the most holy mysteries,” where he probably means nothing more than receiving communion. If you want to participate actively at mass, come to communion. He developed this theme by supporting in 1905 *Sacra Tridentina* on the frequent reception of communion, and in 1910 *Quam singulari* on sharing communion with young children. Second, he called for active participation “in the public and solemn prayer of the Church,” a broad array of dispositions, words and actions that would be elaborated after the Second Vatican Council. Third, people can take “a more active part” in the liturgy by singing chant.

In 1926 Pope Pius XI addressed the International Congress on Pastoral Liturgy, where he praised the developments of the liturgical movement. He expressed the dispositions of the laity at worship:

If the Hierarchy communicates the truth and the grace of Christ by means of the liturgy, the faithful on their side, have a duty to receive them, to give them their whole-hearted consent, to transform them into values for life. They accept all that is offered to them - the graces of the sacrifice of the altar, of the sacraments and sacramentals – not as mere passive recipients of the graces flowing over them, but cooperating in these graces with all their will and strength, and, above all, participating in the liturgical offices, or at least following their performance with fervor.

He also made this caution:

The liturgy of the Mass has for its end the expression through the senses of the grandeur of the mystery which is accomplished in it, and efforts are being made today which tend to make the faithful participate in as active and intelligent a manner as possible. Though this aim is justified, there is risk of lessening reverence if attention is distracted from the main action to direct it to the splendor of other ceremonies.

The main action, he argues, is the sacrifice of Christ at the consecration. Two years later his papal bull *Divini cultus* promoted active participation through singing:

In order that the faithful may more actively participate [*partecipino più attivamente*] in divine worship, let them be made once more to sing the Gregorian Chant, so far as it belongs to them to take part in it. It is most important that when the faithful assist at the sacred ceremonies, or when pious sodalities take part with the clergy in a procession, they should not be merely detached and silent spectators, but, filled with a deep sense of the beauty of the

Liturgy, they should sing alternately with the clergy or the choir, as it is prescribed. If this is done, then it will no longer happen that the people either make no answer at all to the public prayers -- whether in the language of the Liturgy or in the vernacular -- or at best utter the responses in a low and subdued manner.

Pope Pius XII, in his 1947 encyclical *Mediator Dei*, connected active participation with the reception of communion in the eucharistic sacrifice. There (78) he wrote that Christ

wished that all should approach and be drawn to his cross, especially by means of the sacraments and the eucharistic sacrifice, to obtain the salutary fruits obtained by Him upon it. Through this active and individual participation [*actuosa singulorum participatione*], the members of the Mystical Body not only become daily more like to their divine Head, but the life flowing from the Head is imparted to the members.

The fruits of participation, he continued, came from a lively awareness of the part everyone played in offering the sacrifice of the mass. Here in #199 he implies the second definition of his predecessor, participation through a broad array of dispositions, words and actions:

Try in every way, with the means and helps that your prudence deems best, that the clergy and people become one in mind and heart, and that the Christian people take such an active part [*tam actuose participet*] in the liturgy that it becomes a truly sacred action of due worship to the eternal Lord in which the priest, chiefly responsible for the souls of his parish, and the ordinary faithful are united together.

He beautifully describes the challenge of this kind of participation (80):

all the faithful should be aware that to participate in the eucharistic sacrifice [*participare Sacrificium*] is their chief duty and supreme dignity, and that not in an inert and negligent fashion, giving way to distractions and day-dreaming, but with such earnestness and concentration that they may be united as closely as possible with the High Priest, according to the Apostle, 'Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.' [Phil 2:5] And together with Him and through Him let them make their oblation, and in union with Him let them offer up themselves.

It may be argued that with the Second Vatican Council in 1963 the first and third forms of Pius X's participation became examples of the second: Namely, people were expected to participate through a broad array of dispositions, words and actions in the public and solemn prayer of the church, and among the ways of doing so is through receiving communion and through song. Certainly receiving communion is paramount, but it is one of many ways that people were called to participate. Participation is expected of the Christian people partly because of their designation as "a royal priesthood." As baptized members of the

faithful, they have some priestly responsibilities, such as making their oblation and offering up themselves, and these are practiced at the eucharist.

In the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, paragraph 30 shows the Council's detailed view of active participation:

To promote active participation [*actuosam participationem*], the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalms, antiphons, hymns, as well as by actions, gestures and bodily attitudes. And at the proper time a reverent silence should be observed.

This is precisely what we see at typical parish masses today, which shows the successful execution of the Council's liturgical vision. In paragraph 27 the Constitution explained the difference between what is expected now and what had been common:

It is to be stressed that whenever rites, according to their specific nature, make provision for communal celebration involving the presence and active participation of the faithful [*actuosa participazione fidelium*], this way of celebrating them is to be preferred, so far as possible, to a celebration that is individual and quasi-private.

This applies with especial force to the celebration of Mass and the administration of the sacraments, even though every Mass has of itself a public and social nature.

Thus, the Council characterized the preconciliar liturgy as "individual and quasi-private," as when priests often celebrated mass by themselves, and when no mass involved the vocal participation of the people in dialogues.

Paragraph 41 reiterates the point when addressing diocesan celebrations in the presence of the bishop:

Therefore all should hold in great esteem the liturgical life of the diocese centered around the bishop, especially in his cathedral church; they must be convinced that the pre-eminent manifestation of the Church consists in the full active participation [*plenaria et actuosa participazione*] of all God's holy people in these liturgical celebrations, especially in the same eucharist, in a single prayer, at one altar, at which there presides the bishop surrounded by his college of priests and by his ministers.

The Council needed help to form people as active participants. Paragraph 11 enlisted pastors to lead the way:

But in order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds be attuned to their voices, and that they cooperate with heavenly grace lest they receive it in vain (2 Cor 6:1). Pastors of souls must, therefore, realize that, when the liturgy is celebrated, something more is required than the laws governing

valid and lawful celebration. It is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite and enriched by it [*scienter, actuose et fructuose eandem participant*].

This understanding would produce great spiritual benefits, according to paragraph 48:

The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration [*sacram actionem conscie, pie et actuose participant*].

The Council also realized that such participation would have an impact on the structure of church buildings. The arrangement of Catholic church interiors changed after the council in order to foster participation, for example by abandoning long narrow naves in favor of buildings that gather the community around one altar. Paragraph 124 foresaw this:

And when churches are to be built, let great care be taken that they be suitable for the celebration of liturgical services and for the active participation of the faithful [*fidelium actuosam participationem*].

Based on this principle, paragraph 50 of the Constitution authorized the revision of all the liturgical rites, many of which actually expressed the principle of participation in their rubrics.

The rite of the Mass is to be revised in such a way that the intrinsic nature and purpose of its several parts, as also the connection between them, may be more clearly manifested, and that devout and active participation [*pia et actiosa fidelium participatio*] by the faithful may be more easily achieved.

Before looking at examples of these later rubrics, it will prove fruitful to notice paragraph 19 in the Constitution, which had a larger than expected impact in interpreting “participation” 50 years after the council:

With zeal and patience, pastors of souls must promote the liturgical instruction of the faithful, and also their active participation in the liturgy both internally and externally [*actuosam fidelium participationem, internam et externam*], taking into account their age and condition, their way of life, and standard of religious culture. By so doing, pastors will be fulfilling one of the chief duties of a faithful dispenser of the mysteries of God; and in this matter they must lead their flock not only in word but also by example.

This paragraph promotes both internal and external participation, but does not define them. Four years later, 1967, the Sacred Congregation of Rites

distinguished internal and external participation in paragraph 15 of its instruction *Musiam sacram*, citing paragraph 11 of Vatican II's Constitution, which said that the faithful should come to the liturgy with the proper dispositions, and paragraph 30, which encouraged people to take part by means of words, actions and silences.

The faithful fulfill their liturgical role by making that full, conscious and active participation [*plenam illam, consciam atque actuosam participationem*] which is demanded by the nature of the Liturgy itself and which is, by reason of baptism, the right and duty of the Christian people (SC 14). This participation

(a) Should be above all internal, in the sense that by it the faithful join their mind to what they pronounce or hear, and cooperate with heavenly grace (SC 11),

(b) Must be, on the other hand, external also, that is, such as to show the internal participation by gestures and bodily attitudes, by the acclamations, responses and singing (SC 30).

The Constitution did not use the terms "internal" and "external" in paragraphs 11 and 30, not even in the earliest drafts. Hence, *Musiam sacram* set up a distinction that the Constitution itself had not made explicit. Influences for this came from preconciliar sources. In 1958, the same congregation had drawn a distinction between internal and external participation in its instruction *De musica sacra et sacra liturgia*.

Interior participation is the most important; this consists in paying devout attention, and in lifting up the heart to God in prayer (22a).

The participation of the congregation becomes more complete, however, when, in addition to this interior disposition, exterior participation is manifested by external acts, such as bodily position (kneeling, standing, sitting), ceremonial signs, and especially responses, prayers, and singing...

When the papal documents treat of 'active participation' they are speaking of this general participation, of which the outstanding example is the priest, and his ministers who serve at the altar with the proper interior dispositions, and carefully observe the rubrics and ceremonies (22b).

Active participation is perfect when "sacramental" participation is included (22c).

Hence, a postconciliar document on liturgical music from 1967 turned to a preconciliar document on liturgical music from 1958 to draw out a distinction between internal and external participation that the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy did not make so explicit. The 1958 source called interior participation "the most important" kind. It said that the outstanding example of active participation

is the service of the priest and the ministers, and that the perfect expression of active participation is receiving the sacraments.

Vatican II's Constitution avoided any hierarchy of the modes of participation. As the liturgical books were published, they promoted active participation in specific ways that engaged all the faithful spiritually and physically.

The Roman Missal, chief among these books, sounded the theme in its General Instruction (5):

For the celebration of the Eucharist is the action of the whole Church, and in it each one should carry out solely but totally that which pertains to him, in virtue of the place of each within the People of God.... This people, though holy in its origin, nevertheless grows constantly in holiness by conscious, active, and fruitful participation in the mystery of the Eucharist [*ipsam participationem consciam, actuosam et fructuosam*].

The General Instruction (18) promotes participation in “body and mind.” However, it never uses the words “internal” and “external”, never distinguishes them, and never ranks them.

[Fruits] will fittingly come about if, with due regard for the nature and other circumstances of each liturgical assembly, the entire celebration is arranged in such a way that it leads to a conscious, active, and full participation of the faithful [*consciam illam, actuosam atque plenam participationem fidelium*], namely in body and in mind, a participation fervent with faith, hope, and charity, of the sort which is desired by the Church and which is required by the very nature of the celebration and to which the Christian people have a right and duty in virtue of their Baptism.

When addressing the significance of participation, the instruction (20) focuses on perceptible signs that nourish faith.

Since, however, the celebration of the Eucharist, like the entire Liturgy, is carried out by means of perceptible signs by which the faith is nourished, strengthened, and expressed, [cf. SC 59] the greatest care is to be taken that those forms and elements proposed by the Church are chosen and arranged, which, given the circumstances of persons and places, more effectively foster active and full participation [*actuosam et plenam participationem*] and more aptly respond to the spiritual needs of the faithful.

The General Instruction promotes regional adaptations to the celebration of the mass, but first (386) it recalls the basic principles of participation:

The renewal of the Roman Missal carried out in our time in accordance with the decrees of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council has taken great care that all the faithful may display in the celebration of the Eucharist that full, conscious, and active

participation [*plenam illam, consciam atque actuosam participationem*] that is required by the very nature of the Liturgy and to which the faithful, in virtue of their status as such, have a right and duty.

These principles were then applied to specific celebrations. For example, among the rubrics for Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord (5), the priest is to encourage the active participation of the people. In Holy Week, the people were not simply to recall the events of the past, but to enter into them, so the rubric recalls the foundational principle of the liturgical renewal.

After this, the Priest and people sign themselves, while the Priest says: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Then he greets the people in the usual way. A brief address is given, in which the faithful are invited to participate actively and consciously [*actuose et conscie participandam*] in the celebration of this day, in these or similar words....

The introduction to the Paschal Triduum (2) carries a similar instruction for the same reason.

Pastors should, therefore, not fail to explain to the Christian faithful, as best they can, the meaning and order of the celebrations and to prepare them for active and fruitful participation [*ad participationem activam et fructuosam praeparare*].

The rubric for gathering people at the fire for the Easter Vigil suggests active participation. In 1951, the liturgy of the Easter Vigil was updated, thus launching the modern liturgical renewal. The rubric in the third paragraph of the 1951 Easter Vigil asks the priest to arrange the fire in a particular place, "*ubi scilicet populus ritum sacrum melius sequi possit*" (namely, where the people can better follow the sacred rite). That little word "*populus*" was the tiny wedge that cracked open the way to a more active participation of the people. Rubrics in the past had dealt with the priest and the ministers - not with the people. When this rubric was rewritten for paragraph 8 of the postconciliar Easter Vigil, it was phrased this way: "When the people are gathered there" [*Populo ibi congregato*]. The first words of the Order of Mass also changed after the council from "*Sacerdos paratus*", meaning "When the priest is ready," to "*Populo congregato*," or "When the people are gathered." The only difference between the opening words of the Order of Mass in Latin and opening words of the rubric for the fire at the Easter Vigil is the insertion of *ibi*, meaning "there". Very likely the Roman Missal paid tribute to the history of the active participation of the faithful by drawing a verbal link between two key sections of the book - the Order of Mass and the Paschal Triduum.

Other rites also put into the rubrics or the narration the principle of active participation. The Rite of Baptism for Children was one of the first revisions after the council. It says (32),

"If possible, baptism should take place on Sunday, the day on which the Church celebrates the paschal mystery. It should be

conferred in a communal celebration for all the recently born children, and in the presence of the faithful, or at least of relatives, friends, and neighbors, who are all to take an active part [*actuosa participacione*] in the rite .”

The Spanish translation scripts out an introduction for the priest or deacon to say in these or similar words, concluding with this exhortation:

Dispongámonos a participar activamente. [Let us prepare ourselves to participate actively.]

The Rite of Confirmation also took up the phrase in its introductory remarks. It (3) calls on the parents of the confirmands to participate actively in the liturgy.

The role of the parents is also expressed by their active participation [*actuosam participationem*] in the celebration of the Sacraments.

The Rite of Marriage (40) borrows the phrase to permit adaptations by the conferences of bishops. As shown above, the phrase appears in a similar section near the end of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal.

In this regard, it is for the Conferences of Bishops:... \ if necessary, to adapt and supplement this Introduction of The Roman Ritual from no. 36 and what follows (in “The Rite to Be Used”), so as to achieve the conscious and active participation of the faithful. [*ad participationem fidelium consciam et actuosam reddendam*]

Even the Rite of Anointing and Pastoral Care of the Sick applies the same principle to a similar section (38).

The following are the responsibilities of the conferences of bishops in this regard: . . .

e. to adapt and enlarge, if necessary, this Introduction in the Roman Ritual in order to encourage the conscious and active participation of the faithful [*ad participationem fidelium consciam et actuosam reddendam*].”

The Order for the Dedication of a Church (20) encourages catechesis for the benefit of the people:

In order that the faithful may fruitfully take part in the Rite of Dedication, the rector of the church to be dedicated and others experienced in the pastoral ministry are to instruct them on the spiritual, ecclesial, and missionary importance and value of the celebration.

Accordingly, the faithful are to be instructed about the various parts of the church and their use, the Order of the Dedication, and the chief liturgical symbols employed in it so that, fully understanding the meaning of the Dedication of a church through its

rites and prayers, with appropriate help, they may take a conscious, devout, and active part in the sacred action.

Hence, the Constitution's principle of active participation of the people was elaborated in the very liturgical books it caused to be renewed. Homage to this principle appears in more recent documentation. For example, in the 1994 instruction *Varietates legitimae*, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments addressed inculturation and the Roman Liturgy. This is precisely the area where several rites promote an adaptation for active participation, so it is not surprising to read (41),

The gestures and postures of the assembly are signs of its unity and express its active participation [*activam participationem*] and foster the spiritual attitude of the participants.

Pope John Paul II praised the success of the liturgical reform in his 2003 encyclical letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, where he says (10),

Certainly the liturgical reform inaugurated by the Council has greatly contributed to a more conscious, active and fruitful participation [*ad magis consciam, actuosam ac fructuosam fidelium participationem*] in the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar on the part of the faithful.

The pope also had some concerns, which may have prompted the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments to address liturgical abuses the following year in its instruction, *Redemptionis sacramentum*. There are found several references to active participation. It notes (37) that mere presence is not enough.

The participation [*participatio*] of the lay faithful too in the Eucharist and in the other celebrations of the Church's rites cannot be equated with mere presence, and still less with a passive one, but is rather to be regarded as a true exercise of faith and of the baptismal dignity.

This is especially noteworthy given that the Sunday obligation for Catholics is expressed in the Code of Canon Law (1247) not as simply being present for Sunday mass, but participating in it. It is possible to "go" to mass on Sunday and still not fulfill what the law requires.

On Sundays and other holy days of obligation the faithful are obliged to participate in the Mass.

Another canon (528 §2) asks the pastor to promote the active participation of the people.

The pastor is to see to it that the Most Holy Eucharist is the center of the parish assembly of the faithful.

He is to work so that the Christian faithful are nourished through the devout celebration of the sacraments and, in a special way, that they frequently approach the sacraments of the Most Holy Eucharist and penance. He is also to endeavor that they are led to

practice prayer even as families and take part consciously and actively [*conscie et actuose partem habeant*] in the sacred liturgy which, under the authority of the diocesan bishop, the pastor must direct in his own parish and is bound to watch over so that no abuses creep in.

Citing Pope John Paul's encyclical, *Redemptionis sacramentum* (54) gives examples of participating actively and not passively at the mass in ways that include silence, dialogues and acclamations.

The people, however, are always involved actively [*actuose*] and never merely passively: for they “silently join themselves with the Priest in faith, as well as in their interventions during the course of the Eucharistic Prayer as prescribed, namely in the responses in the Preface dialogue, the Sanctus, the acclamation after the consecration and the ‘Amen’ after the final doxology, and in other acclamations approved by the Conference of Bishops with the recognitio of the Holy See” [cf. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 28.]

Redemptionis sacramentum makes two other references. It discourages people from confessing their sins during mass, in order to give each sacrament its due (86).

The faithful should be led insistently to the practice whereby they approach the Sacrament of Penance outside the celebration of Mass, especially at the scheduled times, so that the Sacrament may be administered in a manner that is tranquil and truly beneficial to them, so as not to be prevented from active participation at Mass [*actuosa Missae participatione*].

And it implies that participation requires proper devotion and manner of life (186). Because it speaks of the “Eucharist” rather than the “mass”, it equates participating with receiving communion.

Let all Christ's faithful participate in the Most Holy Eucharist as fully, consciously and actively as they can [*plene, conscie et actuose pro posse participant*], honoring it lovingly by their devotion and the manner of their life.

Some statements have assumed the preconciliar distinction between internal and external participation. In 2007, shortly after Pope Benedict XVI permitted broader use of the preconciliar mass, the Bishops' Committee for Divine Worship, part of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, answered nine questions about the matter. One answer (3) said this:

In both the ordinary and extraordinary forms of the *Missale Romanum*, full, conscious, and active participation of the faithful is to be desired above all else (SC 14). In both forms, this begins with an interior participation in the sacrifice of Christ, to which the gathered assembly is joined by the prayers and rites of the Mass. The ordinary form of the rite customarily accomplishes this participation through listening and responding to the prayers of the

Mass in the vernacular, and by taking part in forms of exterior communal action. The extraordinary form accomplishes this participation largely through listening to the prayers in Latin and following the words and actions of the Priest and joining our hearts to “what is said by him in the Name of Christ and [what] Christ says [to] him” (Pius X Daily Missal).

Vatican II’s Constitution never claimed that active participation begins with interior participation nor that internal and external participations are different enough to merit independent treatment. The preference for internal participation had to be made before the council because there was so little external participation of the people. One probably should not make too much of it, but it is surprising that even though the ordinary form of the mass is indeed ordinary, the first person plural pronoun “our” appears only once in this paragraph, where it pertains to participation in the extraordinary form. Still, it strengthens the view that the authors were explaining participation from a preconciliar viewpoint.

That same year the USCCB issued its own guidelines for liturgical music, *Sing to the Lord*, and the distinction between internal and external participation appeared again - perhaps because the distinction was first drawn in documents pertaining to music. It says (12),

Participation in the Sacred Liturgy must be “internal, in the sense that by it the faithful join their mind to what they pronounce or hear, and cooperate with heavenly grace.” Even when listening to the various prayers and readings of the Liturgy, or to the singing of the choir, the assembly continues to participate actively as they “unite themselves interiorly to what the ministers or choir sing, so that by listening to them they may raise their minds to God” (*Musicam Sacram* 15).

Later it echoes the sentiments of Pius X, who first listed singing as an important mode of active participation (26):

Singing is one of the primary ways that the assembly of the faithful participates actively in the Liturgy. The people are encouraged “to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalms, antiphons [and] hymns” (SC 30). The musical formation of the assembly must be a continuing concern in order to foster full, conscious and active participation.

It also speaks about participation more theologically by citing from the General Instruction (24):

“In the celebration of Mass the faithful form a holy people, a people whom God has made his own, a royal priesthood, so that they may give thanks to God and offer the spotless Victim not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him, and so that they may learn to offer themselves” (GIRM 95). This is the basis for the “full, conscious, and active participation” of the faithful demanded by the very nature of the Liturgy.

When Pope Benedict XVI sent a video address to the Eucharistic Congress in Dublin earlier this year, he must have presumed that the pendulum had swung the other direction. Instead of a preconciliar liturgy focused on internal participation, he saw a postconciliar liturgy focused on external participation:

Yet not infrequently, the revision of liturgical forms has remained at an external level, and “active participation” has been confused with external activity. Hence much still remains to be done on the path of real liturgical renewal. In a changed world, increasingly fixated on material things, we must learn to recognise anew the mysterious presence of the Risen Lord, which alone can give breadth and depth to our life.

Pope Benedict was concerned that where external participation exists, internal participation may be lacking. The reverse can also be true: Internal may exist without external participation. In fact, that is what the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy diagnosed needed to be fixed. In either case, these are difficult matters to discern. Internal participation by nature is subjective. Whether worshipers close their eyes or join the communion procession, no one knows exactly what they are thinking. A lack of external participation, by its nature, is easier to observe. Some people come to mass late and leave early. Others text during scripture readings and homilies. Many decline to receive communion under the form of the Blood of Christ. It is hard to tell if some people sing without meaning the words, but it is easy to tell that some people don't even sing. Even so, who knows? Visibly distracted worshipers could also be engaging in a lively internal participation. Still, if the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy is correct in avoiding too sharp a distinction between these modes of participation, one probably feeds the other. External participation without a proper internal disposition is empty, just as internal participation without proper external activity is dry. Church leaders should encourage internal participation, but it should not sound as though external participation is dispensable. As the preface dialogue gets underway, you can lift up your heart without saying that's what you're doing, but it helps you and the whole community if you say it out loud.

Certainly those who come to celebrate the eucharist intend to focus their attention on matters at hand. However, participation demands a high level of concentration and activity that not all Catholics can give.

As we approach the fiftieth anniversary of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, we may reconnect with all that the Council accomplished in the field of common worship. It brought people into the liturgy more directly than before, inviting them to the riches of this banquet. To participate well does require a variety of skills - the internal discipline to be at prayer, a commitment to catechesis concerning liturgical texts and actions, and a lively communitarian expression in song, acclamation, posture, gesture and silence. Participation at Sunday mass is the single most important thing that Catholics do. First, we have to be there. Then we have to focus our attention there. And then we have to join with our brothers and sisters in Christ. If you do not pray at home, if you take a pew far away from the altar, if you do not sing, if you do not know the names of

people with whom you worship, there are some simple things you can do to enhance your participation and more fully realize the vision of the Second Vatican Council.

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26 October 2012, Gateway Conference, Archdiocese of St. Louis

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21 June 2013, Orlando Liturgical Conference, Diocese of Orlando FL

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