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Light Shining out of Darkness¹

Bishop James D. Conley

Your conference will spend time in serious study on the relationship of the Old Covenant to the New, as expressed in the sacred liturgy, in sacred art and architecture, and in pastoral ministry. This is an important topic, and I expect this conference will prove elucidating. I remember during my days in the seminary reading two very important books on the liturgy that dealt with this topic, both by Father Louis Bouyer: *Liturgical Piety* and *The Meaning of Sacred Scripture*.² As a convert to the Catholic faith, I was always struck by the link between the Temple and sacrifice in the Old Testament, and the New Testament understanding of sacrifice. The proper understanding of this link, as well as the distinctions, is essential to a true understanding of the nature, essence and meaning of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass; these truths will be explored over the coming days.

Discussions and debates about the sacred liturgy can be rather contentious at times, but we are among friends, and so tonight I would like to address my remarks in a somewhat generic way on something that is near and dear to all of our hearts, namely, our particular period in the history of the Church, and the future of the liturgical movement in the life of the Church.

It was February 11, 2013, the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, when Pope Benedict XVI announced his resignation from the office of the Roman Pontiff, the first such resignation in nearly 600 years. He made this announcement in the *Sala del Concistoro*, the large loggia in the Apostolic Palace, in which the tapestries of Raphael hang. It is a beautiful room. The resignation speech of Pope Benedict was, itself, beautiful—spoken in perfect Latin with

1 Keynote Address delivered at the Annual Conference of the Society for Catholic Liturgy at St. Mary's Cathedral, Colorado Springs, Colorado, on October 2, 2014.

2 Louis Bouyer, *Liturgical Piety*, Liturgical Studies, 1 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1955) and *The Meaning of Sacred Scripture*, trans. Mary Perkins Ryan, Liturgical Studies, 5 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958).

a serenity of spirit that we have come to love in Pope Benedict. And for those of us who admire the beauty of the Benedictine pontificate, the moment was profoundly moving.

On March 13, Jorge Cardinal Bergoglio was elected Pope Francis, and he hit the ground running. I am grateful for his witness as a bishop and as a pastor—he is evangelical, pastoral, and faithful to the teachings of the Church. *Lumen Fidei*—from which the title of this talk is derived—and *Evangelii Gaudium* have been influential in my own episcopal ministry and an inspiration to me in my preaching.³

But for many people, the 20 months since the resignation of Pope Benedict have been a time of challenging transition. Pope Benedict was a close friend and collaborator with St. John Paul II—the continuity between their pontificates was constantly evident—beginning with his memorable homily to begin the 2005 conclave, in which combatting the “dictatorship of relativism” became the clarion call for the cardinal electors.

Pope Francis is an Argentine. He had never worked in the Roman Curia; he is the first pope from a religious institute in 167 years, and the first pope in history from the Society of Jesus. He is a man with particular strengths and particular challenges, and his background as a Latin American and as a religious, also give him particular strengths and particular challenges.

For many, the personal and administrative style of the Holy Father has been an adjustment, and for some they have been a challenge. The question of rupture or continuity has been discussed.

The media, of course, has portrayed Pope Francis as a crusader of heterodoxy—as the quiet hero of the liberal left. News reports—and pop culture periodicals and figures like *Rolling Stone* and Jon Stewart—predict that Francis will undermine the deposit of faith in favor of false notions of pastoral care or accommodation to the troubling mores of modernity.

The Holy Father will never consider betraying the deposit of faith. I believe, as you do, that the Pope Francis is a loyal son of the Church. I believe that his fidelity to the faith will be manifested in the whole of his pontificate. But I recognize that for many,

3 Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter on Faith *Lumen Fidei* (29 June 2013) and Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013).

his unfamiliar style and emphases, and his portrayal in the media, have led to confusion, concern and, in some quarters, panic.

And among those who love sacred liturgy, as we do, I am aware of a certain concern regarding the Holy Father's plans for the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite, and for the restoration of beautiful liturgy that began to flourish during the pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI. I would like to address that a bit later tonight.

As many of you know, the Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on "The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization" will open in a few days. The Synod on the Family can be understood as a means to proclaim the universal call to holiness to mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, in the context of their families, the building blocks of culture and society. We need to pray for the success of that synod and for the synod fathers.

The preliminary discussions for the synod have been strange. Like many of you, I have been discouraged by the call, even by senior prelates of the Church, to discard basic components of sacramental theology because of the difficulties they represent. And I have been baffled by some episcopal conferences, which seem to have equivocated on doctrinal issues: such as, cohabitation, contraception, and divorce in the face of increased secularization. It seems to me that in some of the corners of the Church, the universal call to holiness—the summons to greatness and to virtue—is being drowned out by a tide of mediocrity and secularism.

So in less than two years, we have received a new pope, a good and holy man, with a new and unfamiliar style and new emphases and ways of speaking. We have watched the discussions surrounding the family accelerate. In two years, the Church has faced a great period of transition. In some places, that has led to confusion. In some places, that has led to discouragement. In some places, that has led to fear.

We know that in Jesus Christ, our earthly fears pass away. Our worries and anxieties pass away. What remains are the eternal things. What remains are the permanent things. What remains is the victory of Jesus Christ. What remains is hope—hope in Jesus Christ, and hope in his Church.

We have hope because we know what St. Bruno knew, the great Carthusian saint whose feast day we celebrate on October

6. Consecrating the world from their monasteries, St. Bruno's Carthusians remember his motto: "*stat crux dum volvitur orbis*"—"The cross is steady while the world is turning." For some of us, the past two years in the Church's life have led to questions, uncertainty, or confusion. The cross is steady in the face of that confusion. Jesus Christ, the Lord of history, reigns supreme.

We who love the sacred liturgy have a particular awareness of its cosmic nature and its supernatural implications for eternal life in Jesus Christ. We love the Mass precisely because it draws us into the moments of eternity—to witness Calvary, to praise God among the angels and saints, and to share in the mystery of the heavenly banquet.

We love the Mass because we long for eternity, and the Holy Eucharist draws us into the mystery of God's own life. In the words of the great abbot of Solesmes, Dom Prosper Guéranger, in his classic work, *The Liturgical Year*, the sacred liturgy gives the faithful a "keen sense of the supernatural."⁴ We love the Mass because we are made for it; and through the liturgy we come know the meaning of our existence.

But because we love the Mass, we have a responsibility. We have been graced in the Mass with hope—the eternal perspective by which we consecrate our wills to Christ. The call of the Church today is the call of the New Evangelization, the mandate to form—and to become—missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.

Liturgy configures our hearts to Christ's. "Full, active, conscious participation" allows us to live the common priesthood to which we are called. Liturgy makes saints, and in the call of the New Evangelization, the importance of good, and beautiful, and holy worship can never be overstated.

Pope Francis is clear on this fact. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Holy Father writes that "the Church evangelizes and is herself evangelized through the beauty of the liturgy, which is both a celebration of the task of evangelization and the source of her renewed self-giving."⁵ You cannot get much clearer than that.

4 Prosper Guéranger, *The Liturgical Year: Christmas Book I*, trans. Laurence Shepherd (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publications, 2000) 122.

5 *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24.

Worship needs no justification. Beautiful liturgy needs no justification. We build beautiful churches simply because they glorify God. We make beautiful music to honor the Lord. Alone, in his private chapel, the *ars celebrandi* of the priest should be beautiful, simply because the Blessed Trinity merits beautiful worship. We are stewards of the liturgical mysteries: good stewardship is our duty, and our privilege.

But the New Evangelization, the proclamation of the Kingdom, calls for beautiful liturgy in a particular way, now more than ever. Pope Francis says that “formation in the *via pulchritudinis*—the way of beauty—ought to be part of our effort to pass on the faith,” because, he says, “a renewed esteem for beauty is a means of touching the human heart and enabling the truth and goodness of the Risen Christ to radiate within it.”⁶

Beautiful liturgy glorifies God, and awakens a natural human desire for beauty. Music, art and architecture draw men to the transcendent, and to the mystery and beauty of the Blessed Trinity.

The need for beautiful liturgy is incredibly apparent. Across our country, Mass attendance is declining. But America is different from most of Europe where I lived nearly half of my priesthood. In Catholic Europe Mass attendance is so low that only those whose lives are informed entirely by the Gospel attend Mass. If you ask a Catholic in Italy whether he attends Mass, he will tell you: *Io sono cattolico, padre, ma non fanatico* - “I am a Catholic, Father, but I am not a fanatic!”

Mass attendance in the United States is different. Our Sunday Mass attendance is still much higher than it is in secularized Europe. But research shows that many people attend Sunday Mass out of a sense of obligation or duty, without clearly articulated belief, without a prayer life, without a commitment to the teachings of the Church. Matthew Kelly calls these Catholics, those who “stay but quit.”⁷ The “stay and quit” Catholics are in Mass every Sunday, without fail, God bless them. But they are there out of a sense of duty and they do not engage in “full, active and conscious” participation in the liturgy. They are not caught up in the transcendent and awesome love, beauty and mystery of

6 Ibid., 167.

7 From a talk given by Matthew Kelly at a Priest Study Day in the Diocese of Lincoln, at Saint Gregory the Great Seminary, Seward, Nebraska, in September 2013.

the sacred liturgy. They don't have that "keen sense of the supernatural" about which Dom Gueranger speaks. A "good Mass" is determined by how eloquent, funny, fuzzy or clever the homily is. And the converse is also true.

Imagine the transformation of our Church—of culture, in fact—if beautiful liturgy awakened Catholic souls to wonder, to conversion. Imagine the consequences of beautiful liturgy awakening souls to Jesus Christ. It would be shameful for us to watch Catholics walk into a church each Sunday without doing all that we can to bring them into deeper communion with Christ.

This is why the work you are doing is essential to the formation of Christian culture! The Church needs you. None of us have time, very honestly, to be discouraged, or distracted, or anxious. The work of evangelization is too important. The ugliness of secularism demands that we proclaim the *via pulchritudinis* in the cathedrals and chapels and parish churches across the country.

Tonight, as we reflect on the role of worship in the life of the Church, I would like to suggest three principles essential to the promotion of beauty in sacred liturgy.

(1) *Gratitude*. There are nearly 18,000 Catholic parishes in the United States of America. There are also Newman Centers, and convents, and monasteries, and seminaries. It is probably fair to estimate that the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is offered 20,000 times in this nation, every single day. No period in history, and no place on earth, can rival the freedom we have to participate in Holy Mass.

In Syria and Iraq, today, Christians on their way to celebrate the Mass are singled out, kidnapped, brutalized, and executed.

We are obliged to gratitude for our freedom to celebrate the Mass. To be sure, we face real threats to religious liberty in this country. They matter, and we ought to oppose them vigorously. But we also have the freedom to go to Mass every day, without threat to life or limb, without fear of reprisal, without even inconvenience, really. Not one of us has been called to martyrdom, yet.

Each time we enter a Church, or pass one by, we ought to thank God for the freedom we have been given, and make the sign of the cross. No matter the music, the vestments, the architecture—in every corner of this nation, every single day, the Holy

Sacrifice of the Mass is offered. If we are not grateful for that, we ought to reexamine our conscience.

(2) *Charity*. Many of us are graced with formation in the liturgical theology and history of the Church. We have been exposed to beauty, and perhaps we have the capacity to create beautiful things. We have been formed by holy men and women, in the transcendental realities of truth, goodness and beauty. The formation we have been given is a grace. We have not merited our formation; we have been given it for the glory of God.

We cannot propose the *via pulchritudinis*, if we cannot do so with charity. We are stewards of a great mystery, but we must be stewards of humility, as well. The work we do is for the glory of God. And for him, there is nothing more glorious than the salvation of souls.

We are called, above all else, to charity. Charity means that we call people on to truth. We insist on fidelity. But it also means we give the benefit of the doubt to those who seem to lack the formation we've been given. It means that we are teachers, and witnesses, not critics. Charity means that we bring souls into deeper communion with Christ and his Church in humility, patience and generosity, without condemnation or disrespect.

Pope Benedict XVI writes in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* that "in the Church's Liturgy, in her prayer, in the living community of believers, we experience the love of God." He goes on to say: "The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-oblation... entering into the dynamic of his self-giving" in love.⁸

May we strive to transmit the love of God before all else that we do, and in all that we say.

(3) *Steadfast commitment to evangelization*. As many of you know, I became a Catholic under the influence of Dr. John Senior, in the Integrated Humanities Program at the University of Kansas. After graduation, I spent nearly a year at the French Abbey of Fontgombault. You cannot imagine the grace of living mystagogy in the context of that monastery.

My life was attuned to the liturgical seasons, to the correspondence of our work, and the seasons of the farm, with the

8 Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter on Christian Love *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2005) 17 and 13.

daily prayer in our church. I had only been a Catholic for two years and I learned to pray where monks had begun praying 1000 years earlier. I learned what “full, conscious, active participation” really meant amidst timeless prayers and ancient chants, beneath ancient and beautiful works of art. In short, I went to Fontgombault, and my soul was wounded, as Joseph Ratzinger said, “by the arrow of beauty.”⁹

The Lord called me home to Kansas, and eventually to become a priest for the Diocese of Wichita. But Fontgombault, and its foundation at Clear Creek Abbey in Oklahoma continue to stay very close to my heart. And I often find myself wishing I could celebrate Mass more often in those holy monasteries.

I would venture to say that all of us wish we could worship in a place like Fontgombault. And all of us can, once or twice, or more often if we are lucky. But the monastic vocation is relatively uncommon, compared to marriage or priesthood in the secular world, and it is extraordinarily difficult. It is easy to romanticize, but very difficult to live. And those who are not called to the monastic life, a vocation that has its own set of challenges, are called to a different set of challenges—among them the challenge of living and worshipping in the context of the contemporary world in which we live.

Each of us is called to evangelize along the *via pulchritudinis* in the places that need it most: in the ordinary parishes and dioceses and seminaries of this country. We are called, today, to offer generously the resources and formation that will point souls to Christ.

I have to pause here and make note of a recent essay Michael Tamara, an architect student in New York, entitled “How Lovely (Again) is Thy Dwelling Place.” In that essay he highlights the wonderful restoration of churches that were “wreckovated” in the post-conciliar years to a beauty even beyond their original beauty. This is being done in my own diocese of Lincoln under the leadership of Fr. Jamie Hottovy, who is quoted in the article, Kevin Clark and Kate Kelly, of Clark and Associates Architectural firm and many others. We have seen over a dozen churches restored to

9 Joseph Ratzinger, “Wounded by the Arrow of Beauty: The Cross and the New ‘Aesthetics’ of Faith,” in id., *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005) 32–41, at 36.

beauty and there are many more that are currently in the process of being restored – “how lovely, again, is your dwelling place!”¹⁰

In his *Memoirs* written as a Cardinal, Pope Benedict summarized this mission: “A renewal of liturgical awareness, a liturgical reconciliation that again recognizes the unity of the history of the liturgy and that understands Vatican II, not as a breach, but as a stage of development: these things are urgently needed for the life of the Church.”¹¹ Our mission is to bring liturgical renewal to the places in the Church most sorely in need of its effect.

The truth is that very few Catholics will worship at a place like Fontgombault. Most people will know the Mass through their experiences at their local parish. These are places where transformation of the sacred liturgy can bear tremendous fruit. They are also the places where change might be most incremental—where we might work for years to introduce even occasional use of chant or polyphony, or where reintroducing the use of Latin might be a challenge. These are places where the Society for Catholic Liturgy can have a real and profound impact.

And I am convinced that the kind of incremental change that brings liturgy to everyday places will bring more souls to Christ. Missionary work requires patient and steadfast commitment. We are called to be missionaries of beauty. We are called to be missionaries of truth. We will need charity. We will need gratitude. And we will need patience. And, tonight I would like to submit to you that in our work for the promotion of beautiful liturgy, we are able to learn a great deal from the life and ministry of our Holy Father, Pope Francis. We can answer his call for a *via pulchritudinis*.

When the Holy Father was elected, many liturgically-minded friends asked me whether an Argentine Jesuit would support the Extraordinary Form, the use of Latin in the liturgy, the liturgical renaissance which has begun in earnest across the world. It is a fair question.

St. Ignatius had a great love for sacred liturgy. He was moved to tears in the celebration of his first Mass, on Christmas Day in

10 Michael Tamara, “How Lovely (Again) is Thy Dwelling Place,” in *Crisis* (September 2014) at <http://www.crisismagazine.com/2014/love-ly-thy-dwelling-place>.

11 Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs 1927–1977*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998) 148.

1538. And he was frequently overcome at the elevation of the sacred species, and remained in joyous ecstasy for great lengths of time. He was transformed in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

The Society of Jesus was formed a religious community at a time when monastic communities were the norm. But Ignatius did not build monasteries, he sent his priests across the globe on ships. Missionary life, he knew, would be itinerant, unstable, and unpredictable. This means that from the beginning, Ignatius focused liturgical formation on matters of practicality. The liturgical life of the Society of Jesus reflects this history, and obviously, a history of the liturgical life in the Society of Jesus—or any religious community—would be a much longer discussion.

But what is clear to me is that Pope Francis is a man after the heart of St. Ignatius—and like that great saint, he is a man with a demonstrated reverence for the liturgical worship of the Church. He has written, beautifully, on the liturgy in the life of the Church. And his episcopal ministry has required serious effort to restore dignity to the sacred liturgy.

Liturgy in Latin America, is to this day, afflicted with grave problems. Alejandro Bermudez, the founder of Aci Prensa and Catholic News Agency, reports that common in Latin America are “events like priests ‘concelebrating’ the Mass with the youth at the rhythm of tropical songs in Colombia; ‘consecrating’ cakes with Guayaba marmalade in Venezuela; a ‘reggae’ Mass in Panama; or a priest celebrating with vestments portraying Batman and Robin while squirting holy water with a green-and-red water pistol in Mexico.”¹²

This is the context in which Jorge Bergoglio became the auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires in 1992, and then archbishop six years later. When he came to the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires, he faced large “concelebrations,” in which entire communities would be encouraged to recite the Eucharistic prayer, liberation theologians singing socialist anthems in the place of sacred hymnody, and priests attempting to “consecrate” sweet potatoes, instead of true altar bread, in the name of solidarity with the poor itinerant farmers.

12 Alejandro Bermudez, “Pope Francis and the Liturgy,” in *National Catholic Register* (11 May 2013) at <http://m.ncregister.com/daily-news/pope-francis-and-the-liturgy#.VRhQJUam-JI>.

To combat those abuses, Bergoglio spent time with the priests of his diocese, and fraternally, patiently, and charitably, he restored a semblance of order to the liturgical life of the archdiocese. In fact, he restored a semblance of order to a presbyterate that had, for the most part, lost its identity.

He used patience, charity, and steadfast commitment. But Cardinal Bergoglio worked seriously to restore the dignity of sacred liturgy—to ensure that the faithful had the opportunity to attend valid, licit, and reverent liturgies. And we need only look at the *ars celebrandi* of the Holy Father, which is simple, without a doubt, but which is reverent, and solemn, and faithful.

Pope Francis knows the effort required to restore beauty, truth, and goodness in sacred liturgy. *Evangelii Gaudium* calls us to do the same. Liturgy must lead to an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ. Pope Francis, in that inspiring document, quotes his predecessor, Pope Benedict in saying that “being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and decisive direction.”¹³ That event, that person, is encountered in the beauty and mystery of sacred liturgy well celebrated.

Pope Francis’s *ars celebrandi* is simple, perhaps, but would that we all might become simple servants of the sacred liturgy. We can learn from the charity of Pope Francis. We can learn from his choices. And we can be encouraged by his leadership. In the midst of interesting times, may our hearts be fixed on the cross, which stands as the world turns—*stat crux dum volvitur orbis*. May our hearts be fixed on the formation of missionary disciples—on the *via pulchritudinis* which draws all men to Christ. May we be simple servants of the sacred liturgy.

And, as light shining out of darkness, in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, may we glimpse the Lord of history, the eternal victor—Jesus Christ, our hope in *sacula saeculorum*.

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13 *Evangelii Gaudium*, 7, quoting *Deus Caritas Est*, 1.