

1. Introduction

- a. As Pope Benedict told us in his meditation on Jesus’ prayer during the Last Supper, the institution of the Eucharist is the “great prayer of Jesus and the Church.”
- b. More than anything else, he has tried to get the Church to learn from Jesus how to pray the Mass well. If the Mass is the source and the summit of the Christian life, it is key for it to be the source and summit of our life if our life is going to be Christian, and that involves first praying the Mass and then living a Eucharistic life, which means keeping our communion and adoring the Lord we receive.
- c. Tonight, rather briefly, I’d like to focus on some of Pope Benedict’s thoughts on the Eucharist, focusing first on praying and living the Mass and then on adoring Christ as an extension of our praying and living the Mass.

2. Benedict on the Mass

- a. Light of the World
 - i. The point of the Church is to turn us toward God and to enable God to enter into the world. The liturgy is the act in which we believe that *he* enters our lives and that we touch him. It is the act in which what is really essential takes place: We come into contact with God. He comes to us — and we are illumined by him.
 - ii. If it is true — as we believe it is — that Christ is really present in the Eucharist, then this is the event that is at the center of absolutely everything. It is the event, not just of a single day, but of the history of the world as a whole, as the decisive force that then becomes the source from which changes can come. The important point is that the Lord’s Word and his real presence in the signs are inseparable in the Eucharist. It is important that we also receive instruction in the Word. That we answer through our prayer and that God’s guidance, our following, and our allowing ourselves be changed thus form an interlocking whole — so that men themselves can be changed, which is the most important precondition for any really positive change in the world. If we want the world to move forward a little, the only criterion in terms of which this can happen is God, who enters into our lives as a real presence. The Eucharist is the place where men can receive the kind of formation from which new things come into being. This is why the great figures who throughout history have really brought about revolutions for the good have been the saints who, touched by Christ, have brought new impulses into the world.
- b. St. Mathilde of Hackeborn: Personal and liturgical prayer, especially the Liturgy of the Hours and Holy Mass are at the root of St Matilda of Hackeborn's spiritual experience. In letting herself be guided by Sacred Scripture and nourished by the Bread of the Eucharist, she followed a path of close union with the Lord, ever in full fidelity to the Church. **This is also a strong invitation to us to intensify our friendship with the Lord, especially through daily prayer and attentive, faithful and active participation in Holy Mass. The Liturgy is a great school of spirituality.**

3. Crisis of the Liturgy

- a. One of the problems is that this hasn’t been happening. Benedict has been brutal in his criticism of some of the changes after Vatican II as harming this type of formation that the Mass is supposed to give. Rather than forming us, it has been deforming us.
- b. Milestones
 - i. [The reforms of the liturgy after Vatican II] makes the liturgy appear to be no longer a living development but the product of erudite work and juridical authority; this has caused us **enormous harm**. For then the impression had to emerge that liturgy is something “made,” not something given in advance but something lying within our power of

decision. From this it also follows that we are not to recognize the scholars and the central authority alone as decision makers, but that in the end each and every “community” must provide itself with its own liturgy. When liturgy is self-made, however, then it can no longer give us what its proper gift should be: the encounter with the mystery that is not our own product but rather our origin and the source of our life. 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. **I am convinced that the crisis in the Church that we are experiencing today is to a large extent due to the disintegration of the liturgy, which at times has even come to be conceived of *etsi Deus non daretur*: in that it is a matter of indifference whether or not God exists and whether or not he speaks to us and hears us.** ... Then the community is celebrating only itself, an activity that is utterly fruitless. And because the ecclesial community cannot have its origin from itself but emerges as a unity only from the Lord, through faith, such circumstances will inexorably result in a disintegration into sectarian parties of all kinds — partisan opposition within a Church tearing herself apart. This is why we need a new Liturgical Movement, which will call to life the real heritage of the Second Vatican Council.

c. July 2004 address

- i. If the Liturgy appears first of all as the workshop for our activity, then what is essential is being forgotten: God. For the Liturgy is not about us, but about God. **Forgetting about God is the most imminent danger of our age.** As against this, the Liturgy should be setting up a sign of God's presence. Yet what happens if the habit of forgetting about God makes itself at home in the Liturgy itself and if in the Liturgy we are thinking only of ourselves? In any and every liturgical reform, and every liturgical celebration, the primacy of God should be kept in view first and foremost.

d. Ratzinger report

- i. The liturgy is not a show, a spectacle, requiring brilliant producers and talented actors. The life of the liturgy does not consist in pleasant surprises and attractive ideas but in solemn repetitions. It cannot be an expression of what is current and transitory, for it expresses the mystery of the Holy. Many people have felt and said that liturgy must be ‘made’ by the whole community if it is really to belong to them. Such an attitude has led to the ‘success’ of the liturgy being measured by its effect at the level of spectacle and entertainment. **It is to lose sight of what is distinctive to the liturgy, which does not come from what we do but from the fact that something is taking place here that all of us together cannot ‘make.’** In the liturgy there is a power, an energy at work that not even the church as a whole can generate: what it manifests is the Wholly Other, coming to us through the community (which is hence not sovereign, but servant, purely instrumental). Liturgy for the Catholic is his common homeland, the source of his identity. Another reason why it must be something given and constant is that, by means of the ritual, it manifests the holiness of God. The revolt against what has been described as the old rubricist rigidity, which was accused of stifling creativity, has in fact made the liturgy into a do-it-yourself patchwork and trivialized it, adapting it to our mediocrity.

e. God and the world

- i. The liturgy is never a mere meeting of a group of people, who make up their own form of celebration and then, so far as possible, celebrate it themselves. Instead of that, through our sharing in Jesus’ appearing before the Father, we stand both as members of the worldwide community of the whole Church and also of the *communio sanctorum*, the communion of all saints. Yes, in a certain sense, this is the liturgy of heaven. That is its true greatness, that heaven is torn open here, and we are incorporated in the great chorus of praise. And that is why the Preface ends with these words: With all the choirs of angels

in heaven, we join in singing. And we know that we are not alone, that we are joining in, that the barrier between earth and heaven has truly been torn open.

- ii. We do at least need a new liturgical consciousness, to be rid of this spirit of arbitrary fabrication. Things have gone so far that Sunday liturgy groups are cobbling together the liturgy for themselves. What is being offered here is certainly the work of a few clever and hard-working people who have made something up. But what I encounter in that is no longer the Wholly Other, the Holy One being offered to me, but rather the cleverness and hard work of a few people. **And I notice that that is not what I am looking for. It's too little, and it's something else.** The most important thing today is that we should regain respect for the liturgy and for the fact that it is not to be manipulated. That we learn to know it again as the living entity that has grown up and has been given us, in which we take part in the heavenly liturgy. That we do not seek self-fulfillment in it but rather the gift that comes to us. That, I believe, is the first thing we need, so that this peculiar or unauthorized fabrication may vanish again and the inner sense for holiness be reawakened.
- f. Spirit of the Liturgy
- i. Cardinal Ratzinger uses the incident of the worship of the "golden calf" in Exodus 32: 1-35 to make the point that the liturgy to be real must be revelatory, celebrated as God decrees, not only in its ritual details but in the totality of its meaning and spirit. He writes: "In the Old Testament there is a series of very important testimonies to the truth that liturgy is not a matter of 'what you please'. Nowhere is this more dramatically evident than in the narrative of the golden calf...The cult conducted by the high priest Aaron is not meant to serve any false gods of the heathens. The apostasy is more subtle. There is no obvious turning away from God to the false gods. Outwardly, the people remain completely attached to the same God...Presumably even the ritual is in complete conformity to the rubrics. And yet it is a falling away from the worship of God to idolatry. This apostasy which outwardly is scarcely perceptible has two causes. First, there is a violation of the prohibition of images. The people cannot cope with the invisible, remote, and mysterious God. They want to bring him down into their own world, into what they can see and understand. Worship is not longer going up to God, but drawing God down to one's own world...Man is using God...he is placing himself above God...second point: the worship of the golden calf is a self-generated cult... When...God himself becomes inaccessible, the people just fetch him back. Worship becomes...a festival of self-affirmation...The narration of the golden calf is a warning about any kind of self-initiated and self-seeking worship. Ultimately, it is no longer concerned with God but with giving oneself a nice little alternative world, manufactured from one's own resources...an apostasy in sacral disguise."]

4. Liturgical orientation

- a. Must be focused on God
- b. Modern man has little understanding of this "orientation."
- c. Now we can indeed pray everywhere, and God is accessible to us everywhere. This idea of the universality of God is a consequence of Christian universality, of the Christian's looking up to God above all gods, the God who embraces the cosmos and is more intimate to us than we are to ourselves. But our knowledge of this universality is the fruit of revelation: God has shown himself to us. Only for this reason do we know him, only for this reason can we confidently pray to him everywhere. And precisely for this reason is it appropriate, now as in the past, that we should express in Christian prayer our turning to the God who has revealed himself to us. Just as God assumed a body and entered the time and space of this world, so it is appropriate to prayer – at least to communal liturgical prayer – that our speaking to God should be "incarnational," that it should be Christological, turned through the incarnate Word to the Triune God. The cosmic symbol of the rising sun expresses the universality of God above all particular places and yet maintains the concreteness of divine revelation. Our praying is thus inserted into the procession of the nations to God.

- d. Admittedly, these connections were obscured or fell into total oblivion in the church buildings and liturgical practice of the modern age. This is the only explanation for the fact that the common direction of prayer of priest and people got labeled as "celebrating towards the wall" or "turning your back on the people" and came to seem absurd and totally unacceptable. And this alone explains why the meal – even in modern pictures – became the normative idea of liturgical celebration for Christians. In reality what happened was that an unprecedented clericalization came on the scene. Now the priest – the "presider," as they now prefer to call him – becomes the real point of reference for the whole liturgy. Everything depends on him. We have to see him, to respond to him, to be involved in what he is doing. His creativity sustains the whole thing.
- e. Not surprisingly, people try to reduce this newly created role by assigning all kinds of liturgical functions to different individuals and entrusting the "creative" planning of the liturgy to groups of people who like to, and are supposed to, "make their own contribution." Less and less is God in the picture. More and more important is what is done by the human beings who meet here and do not like to subject themselves to a "pre-determined pattern."
- f. The turning of the priest towards the people has turned the community into a self-enclosed circle. In its outward form, it no longer opens out on what lies ahead and above, but is closed in on itself. The common turning towards the East was not a "celebration towards the wall"; it did not mean that the priest "had his back to the people": the priest himself was not regarded as so important. For just as the congregation in the synagogue looked together toward Jerusalem, so in the Christian liturgy the congregation looked together "towards the Lord." As one of the Fathers of Vatican II's Constitution on the Liturgy, J. A. Jungmann, put it, it was much more a question of priest and people facing in the same direction, knowing that together they were in a procession towards the Lord. They did not close themselves into a circle, they did not gaze at one another, but as the pilgrim People of God they set off for the *Oriens*, for the Christ who comes to meet us.
- g. But is this not all romanticism and nostalgia for the past? Can the original form of Christian prayer still say something to us today, or should we try to find our own form, a form for our own times? Of course, we cannot simply replicate the past. Every age must discover and express the essence of the liturgy anew. The point is to discover this essence amid all the changing appearances. It would surely be a mistake to reject all the reforms of our century wholesale. When the altar was very remote from the faithful, it was right to move it back to the people. In cathedrals this made possible the recovery of the tradition of the altar at the crossing, the meeting-point of the nave and the presbyterium. It was also important clearly to distinguish the place for the Liturgy of the Word from the place for the strictly Eucharistic liturgy. For the Liturgy of the Word is about speaking and responding, and so a face-to-face exchange between proclaimer and hearer does make sense. In the Psalm the hearer internalizes what he has heard, takes it into himself, and transforms it into prayer, so that it becomes a response.
- h. On the other hand, a common turning to the East during the Eucharistic Prayer remains essential. This is not a case of something accidental, but of what is essential. Looking at the priest has no importance. What matters is looking together at the Lord. It is not now a question of dialogue, but of common worship, of setting off towards the One who is to come. What corresponds with the reality of what is happening is not the closed circle, but the common movement forward expressed in a common direction for prayer.
- i. Ought we really to be rearranging everything all over again? Nothing is more harmful to the liturgy than a constant activism, even if it seems to be for the sake of genuine renewal. I see a solution in a suggestion that comes from the insights of Erik Peterson. Facing east, as we heard, was linked with the "sign of the Son of Man," with the Cross, which announces the Lord's Second Coming. That is why very early on the east was linked with the sign of the Cross. Where a direct common turning towards the east is not possible, the cross can serve as the interior "east" of faith. It should stand in the middle of the altar and be the common point of focus for both priest and praying community. In this way we obey the ancient call to prayer: "*Conversi ad Dominum,*" "Turn to the Lord!" In this way we look together at the One whose death tore the veil of the Temple – the One who stands before the Father for us and encloses us in his arms in order to make us the new and

living Temple.

- j. Moving the altar cross to the side to give an uninterrupted view of the priest is something I regard as one of the truly absurd phenomena of recent decades. Is the cross disruptive during Mass? Is the priest more important than the Lord? This mistake should be corrected as quickly as possible: it can be done without further rebuilding. The Lord is the point of reference. He is the rising sun of history. That is why there can be a cross of the Passion, which represents the suffering Lord who for us let his side be pierced, from which flowed blood and water (Eucharist and Baptism), as well as a cross of triumph, which expresses the idea of the Second Coming and guides our eyes towards it. For it is always the one Lord: Christ yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8).

5. Logike Latreia

- a. VD 70. We can apply Saint Augustine's words, in his *Confessions*, about the eternal *Logos* as the food of our souls. Stressing the mysterious nature of this food, Augustine imagines the Lord saying to him: "I am the food of grown men; grow, and you shall feed upon me; nor shall you change me, like the food of your flesh, into yourself, but you shall be changed into me" (198). It is not the eucharistic food that is changed into us, but rather we who are mysteriously transformed by it. Christ nourishes us by uniting us to himself; "he draws us into himself." (199)
- b. Here the Eucharistic celebration appears in all its power as the source and summit of the Church's life, since it expresses at once both the origin and the fulfillment of the new and definitive worship of God, the *logiké latreía*. (200) Saint Paul's exhortation to the Romans in this regard is a concise description of how the Eucharist makes our whole life a spiritual worship pleasing to God: "I appeal to you therefore, my brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (*Rom* 12:1). In these words the new worship appears as a total self-offering made in communion with the whole Church. The Apostle's insistence on the offering of our bodies emphasizes the concrete human reality of a worship which is anything but disincarnate. The Bishop of Hippo goes on to say that "this is the sacrifice of Christians: that we, though many, are one body in Christ. The Church celebrates this mystery in the sacrament of the altar, as the faithful know, and there she shows them clearly that in what is offered, she herself is offered." (201) Catholic doctrine, in fact, affirms that the Eucharist, as the sacrifice of Christ, is also the sacrifice of the Church, and thus of all the faithful. (202) This insistence on sacrifice – a "making sacred" – expresses all the existential depth implied in the transformation of our human reality as taken up by Christ (cf. *Phil* 3:12).
- c. 71. Christianity's new worship includes and transfigures every aspect of life: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (*1 Cor* 10:31). Christians, in all their actions, are called to offer true worship to God. **Here the intrinsically eucharistic nature of Christian life begins to take shape.** The Eucharist, since it embraces the concrete, everyday existence of the believer, makes possible, day by day, the progressive transfiguration of all those called by grace to reflect the image of the Son of God (cf. *Rom* 8:29ff.). There is nothing authentically human – our thoughts and affections, our words and deeds – that does not find in the sacrament of the Eucharist the form it needs to be lived to the full. Here we can see the full human import of the radical newness brought by Christ in the Eucharist: the worship of God in our lives cannot be relegated to something private and individual, but tends by its nature to permeate every aspect of our existence. Worship pleasing to God thus becomes a new way of living our whole life, each particular moment of which is lifted up, since it is lived as part of a relationship with Christ and as an offering to God. The glory of God is the living man (cf. *1 Cor* 10:31). And the life of man is the vision of God. (203)
- d. 72. From the beginning Christians were clearly conscious of this radical newness which the Eucharist brings to human life. The faithful immediately perceived the profound influence of the Eucharistic celebration on their manner of life. Saint Ignatius of Antioch expressed this truth when he called Christians "those who have attained a new hope," and described them as "those living in accordance with the Lord's Day" (*in iuxta dominicam viventes*) (204). This phrase of the great Antiochene martyr highlights the connection between the reality of the Eucharist and everyday Christian life. The Christians' customary practice of gathering on the first day after the Sabbath to

celebrate the resurrection of Christ – according to the account of Saint Justin Martyr(205) – is also what defines the form of a life renewed by an encounter with Christ. Saint Ignatius' phrase – "living in accordance with the Lord's Day" – also emphasizes that this holy day becomes paradigmatic for every other day of the week. Indeed, it is defined by something more than the simple suspension of one's ordinary activities, a sort of parenthesis in one's usual daily rhythm. Christians have always experienced this day as the first day of the week, since it commemorates the radical newness brought by Christ. **Sunday is thus the day when Christians rediscover the eucharistic form which their lives are meant to have.** "Living in accordance with the Lord's Day" means living in the awareness of the liberation brought by Christ and making our lives a constant self-offering to God, so that his victory may be fully revealed to all humanity through a profoundly renewed existence.

6. Benedict on adoration

a. Verbum Domini

- i. 66. One of the most moving moments of the Synod came when we gathered in Saint Peter's Basilica, together with a great number of the faithful, for eucharistic adoration. In this act of prayer, and not just in words, the assembly of Bishops wanted to point out the intrinsic relationship between eucharistic celebration and eucharistic adoration. A growing appreciation of this significant aspect of the Church's faith has been an important part of our experience in the years following the liturgical renewal desired by the Second Vatican Council. During the early phases of the reform, the inherent relationship between Mass and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was not always perceived with sufficient clarity. For example, an objection that was widespread at the time argued that the eucharistic bread was given to us not to be looked at, but to be eaten. In the light of the Church's experience of prayer, however, this was seen to be a false dichotomy. As Saint Augustine put it: "nemo autem illam carnem manducat, nisi prius adoraverit; peccemus non adorando – no one eats that flesh without first adoring it; we should sin were we not to adore it." (191) In the Eucharist, the Son of God comes to meet us and desires to become one with us; **eucharistic adoration is simply the natural consequence of the eucharistic celebration, which is itself the Church's supreme act of adoration.** (192) **Receiving the Eucharist means adoring him whom we receive. Only in this way do we become one with him, and are given, as it were, a foretaste of the beauty of the heavenly liturgy. The act of adoration outside Mass prolongs and intensifies all that takes place during the liturgical celebration** itself. Indeed, **"only in adoration can a profound and genuine reception mature.** And it is precisely this personal encounter with the Lord that then strengthens the social mission contained in the Eucharist, which seeks to break down not only the walls that separate the Lord and ourselves, but also and especially the walls that separate us from one another" (193).
- ii. 67. With the Synod Assembly, therefore, I heartily recommend to the Church's pastors and to the People of God the practice of eucharistic adoration, both individually and in community (194). Great benefit would ensue from a suitable catechesis explaining the importance of this act of worship, which enables the faithful to experience the liturgical celebration more fully and more fruitfully. Wherever possible, it would be appropriate, especially in densely populated areas, to set aside specific churches or oratories for perpetual adoration. I also recommend that, in their catechetical training, and especially in their preparation for First Holy Communion, children be taught the meaning and the beauty of spending time with Jesus, and helped to cultivate a sense of awe before his presence in the Eucharist.
- iii. 68. The personal relationship which the individual believer establishes with Jesus present in the Eucharist constantly points beyond itself to the whole communion of the Church and nourishes a fuller sense of membership in the Body of Christ. For this reason, besides encouraging individual believers to make time for personal prayer before the Sacrament of the Altar, I feel obliged to urge parishes and other church groups to set aside times for

collective adoration. Naturally, already existing forms of eucharistic piety retain their full value. I am thinking, for example, of processions with the Blessed Sacrament, especially the traditional procession on the Solemnity of *Corpus Christi*, the Forty Hours devotion, local, national and international Eucharistic Congresses, and other similar initiatives. If suitably updated and adapted to local circumstances, these forms of devotion are still worthy of being practiced today.

- b. Ratzinger: The basic form of adoration is the Liturgy (Spirit of the Liturgy)
- c. St. Alphonsus: Among the forms of prayer fervently recommended by St Alphonsus, stands out the visit to the Blessed Sacrament, or as we would call it today, “adoration”, brief or extended, personal or as a community, before the Eucharist. “Certainly”, St Alphonsus writes, “amongst all devotions, after that of receiving the sacraments, that of adoring Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament takes the first place, is the most pleasing to God, and the most useful to ourselves. . . . Oh, what a beautiful delight to be before an altar with faith. . . . to represent our wants to him, as a friend does to a friend in whom he places all his trust.”

7. What is adoration?

a. Cologne

- i. By making the bread into his Body and the wine into his Blood, Jesus anticipates his death, he accepts it in his heart, and he transforms it into an action of love. What on the outside is simply brutal violence - the Crucifixion - from within becomes an act of total self-giving love. This is the substantial transformation which was accomplished at the Last Supper and was destined to set in motion a series of transformations leading ultimately to the transformation of the world when God will be all in all (cf. I Cor 15: 28).
- ii. In their hearts, people always and everywhere have somehow expected a change, a transformation of the world. Here now is the central act of transformation that alone can truly renew the world: violence is transformed into love, and death into life.
- iii. Since this act transmutes death into love, death as such is already conquered from within, the Resurrection is already present in it. Death is, so to speak, mortally wounded, so that it can no longer have the last word.
- iv. To use an image well known to us today, this is like inducing nuclear fission in the very heart of being - the victory of love over hatred, the victory of love over death. Only this intimate explosion of good conquering evil can then trigger off the series of transformations that little by little will change the world.
- v. All other changes remain superficial and cannot save. For this reason we speak of redemption: what had to happen at the most intimate level has indeed happened, and we can enter into its dynamic. Jesus can distribute his Body, because he truly gives himself.
- vi. This first fundamental transformation of violence into love, of death into life, brings other changes in its wake. Bread and wine become his Body and Blood.
- vii. But it must not stop there; on the contrary, the process of transformation must now gather momentum. The Body and Blood of Christ are given to us so that we ourselves will be transformed in our turn. We are to become the Body of Christ, his own Flesh and Blood.
- viii. We all eat the one bread, and this means that we ourselves become one. In this way, adoration, as we said earlier, becomes union. God no longer simply stands before us as the One who is totally Other. He is within us, and we are in him. His dynamic enters into us and then seeks to spread outwards to others until it fills the world, so that his love can truly become the dominant measure of the world.
- ix. I like to illustrate this new step urged upon us by the Last Supper by drawing out the different nuances of the word “adoration” in Greek and in Latin. The Greek word is *proskynesis*. It refers to the gesture of submission, the recognition of God as our true measure, supplying the norm that we choose to follow. It means that freedom is not simply about enjoying life in total autonomy, but rather about living by the measure of truth and goodness, so that we ourselves can become true and good. This gesture is necessary even if initially our yearning for freedom makes us inclined to resist it.

- x. We can only fully accept it when we take the second step that the Last Supper proposes to us. The Latin word for adoration is *ad-oratio* - mouth to mouth contact, a kiss, an embrace, and hence, ultimately love. Submission becomes union, because he to whom we submit is Love. In this way submission acquires a meaning, because it does not impose anything on us from the outside, but liberates us deep within.
 - xi. Jesus' hour seeks to become our own hour and will indeed become so if we allow ourselves, through the celebration of the Eucharist, to be drawn into that process of transformation that the Lord intends to bring about. The Eucharist must become the centre of our lives.
8. Postures of prayer: Kneeling
- a. Light of the World: [Communion on the tongue kneeling] I am not opposed in principle to communion in the hand; I have both administered and received communion in this way myself. The idea behind my current practice of having people kneel to receive communion on the tongue was to send a signal and to underscore the real presence with an exclamation point. ... I wanted to send a clear signal. I wanted it to be clear: Something quite special is going on here! He is here, the One before whom we fall on our knees! Pay attention! This is not just some social ritual in which we can take part if we want to.
 - b. Spirit of the Liturgy
 - i. There are groups, of no small influence, who are trying to talk us out of kneeling. "It doesn't suit our culture", they say (which culture?) "It's not right for a grown man to do this — he should face God on his feet". Or again: "It's not appropriate for redeemed man — he has been set free by Christ and doesn't need to kneel any more. "
 - ii. If we look at history, we can see that the Greeks and Romans rejected kneeling. In view of the squabbling, partisan deities described in mythology, this attitude was thoroughly justified. It was only too obvious that these gods were not God, even if you were dependent on their capricious power and had to make sure that, whenever possible, you enjoyed their favor. And so they said that kneeling was unworthy of a free man, unsuitable for the culture of Greece, something the barbarians went in for. Plutarch and Theophrastus regarded kneeling as an expression of superstition.
 - iii. Aristotle called it a barbaric form of behavior (cf. Rhetoric 1361 a36). Saint Augustine agreed with him in a certain respect: the false gods were only the masks of demons, who subjected men to the worship of money and to self-seeking, thus making them "servile" and superstitious. He said that the humility of Christ and His love, which went as far as the Cross, have freed us from these powers. We now kneel before that humility. The kneeling of Christians is not a form of inculturation into existing customs. It is quite the opposite, an expression of Christian culture, which transforms the existing culture through a new and deeper knowledge and experience of God.
 - iv. Kneeling does not come from any culture — it comes from the Bible and its knowledge of God. The central importance of kneeling in the Bible can be seen in a very concrete way. The word proskynein alone occurs fifty-nine times in the New Testament, twenty-four of which are in the Apocalypse, the book of the heavenly Liturgy, which is presented to the Church as the standard for her own Liturgy.
 - v. On closer inspection, we can discern three closely related forms of posture. First there is **prostratio** — lying with one's face to the ground before the overwhelming power of God; secondly, especially in the New Testament, **there is falling to one's knees before another; and thirdly, there is kneeling**. Linguistically, the three forms of posture are not always clearly distinguished. They can be combined or merged with one another.
 - 1. **Prostration**
 - a. For the sake of brevity, I should like to mention, in the case of prostratio, just one text from the Old Testament and another from the New.
 - b. In the Old Testament, there is an appearance of God to Joshua before the taking of Jericho, an appearance that the sacred author quite deliberately

presents as a parallel to God's revelation of Himself to Moses in the burning bush. Joshua sees "the commander of the army of the Lord" and, having recognized who He is, throws himself to the ground. At that moment he hears the words once spoken to Moses: "Put off your shoes from your feet; for the place where you stand is holy" (Josh 5:15). In the mysterious form of the "commander of the army of the Lord", the hidden God Himself speaks to Joshua, and Joshua throws himself down before Him.

- c. Origen gives a beautiful interpretation of this text: "Is there any other commander of the powers of the Lord than our Lord Jesus Christ?" According to this view, Joshua is worshipping the One who is to come — the coming of Christ.
- d. In the case of the New Testament, from the Fathers onward, Jesus' prayer on the Mount of Olives was especially important. According to Saint Matthew (22:39) and Saint Mark (14:35), Jesus throws Himself to the ground; indeed, He falls to the earth (according to Matthew). However, Saint Luke, who in his whole work (both the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles) is in a special way the theologian of kneeling prayer, tells us that Jesus prayed on His knees. This prayer, the prayer by which Jesus enters into His Passion, is an example for us, both as a gesture and in its context. The gesture: Jesus assumes, as it were, the fall of man, lets himself fall into man's fallenness, prays to the Father out of the lowest depths of human dereliction and anguish. He lays His will in the will of the Father's: "Not my will but yours be done." He lays the human will in the divine. He takes up all the hesitation of the human will and endures it. It is this very conforming of the human will to the divine that is the heart of redemption. For the fall of man depends on the contradiction of wills, on the opposition of the human will to the divine, which the tempter leads man to think is the condition of his freedom. Only one's own autonomous will, subject to no other will, is freedom. "Not my will, but yours . . ." — those are the words of truth, for God's will is not in opposition to our own, but the ground and condition of its possibility. Only when our will rests in the will of God does it become truly will and truly free.
- e. The suffering and struggle of Gethsemane is the struggle for this redemptive truth, for this uniting of what is divided, for the uniting that is communion with God. Now we understand why the Son's loving way of addressing the Father, "Abba", is found in this place (cf. Mk 14:36). Saint Paul sees in this cry the prayer that the Holy Spirit places on our lips (cf. Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6) and thus anchors our Spirit-filled prayer in the Lord's prayer in Gethsemane.
- f. In the Church's Liturgy today, prostration appears on two occasions: on Good Friday and at ordinations. On Good Friday, the day of the Lord's crucifixion, it is the fitting expression of our sense of shock at the fact that we by our sins share in the responsibility for the death of Christ. We throw ourselves down and participate in His shock, in His descent into the depths of anguish. We throw ourselves down and so acknowledge where we are and who we are: fallen creatures whom only He can set on their feet. We throw ourselves down, as Jesus did, before the mystery of God's power present to us, knowing that the Cross is the true burning bush, the place of the flame of God's love, which burns but does not destroy.
- g. At ordinations prostration comes from the awareness of our absolute incapacity, by our own powers, to take on the priestly mission of Jesus

Christ, to speak with His "I". While the ordinands are lying on the ground, the whole congregation sings the Litany of the Saints. I shall never forget lying on the ground at the time of my own priestly and episcopal ordination. When I was ordained bishop, my intense feeling of inadequacy, incapacity, in the face of the greatness of the task was even stronger than at my priestly ordination. The fact that the praying Church was calling upon all the saints, that the prayer of the Church really was enveloping and embracing me, was a wonderful consolation. In my incapacity, which had to be expressed in the bodily posture of prostration, this prayer, this presence of all the saints, of the living and the dead, was a wonderful strength — it was the only thing that could, as it were, lift me up. Only the presence of the saints with me made possible the path that lay before me.

2. **Kneeling Before Another**

- a. Secondly, we must mention the gesture of falling to one's knees before another, which is described four times in the Gospels (cf. Mk 1:40; 10:17; Mt 17:14; 27:29) by means of the word *gonypetein*. Let us single out Mark 1:40. A leper comes to Jesus and begs Him for help. He falls to his knees before Him and says: "If you will, you can make me clean." It is hard to assess the significance of the gesture. What we have here is surely not a proper act of adoration, but rather a supplication expressed fervently in bodily form, while showing a trust in a power beyond the merely human.
- b. The situation is different, though, with the classical word for adoration on one's knees — *proskynein*. I shall give two examples in order to clarify the question that faces the translator.
- c. First there is the account of how, after the multiplication of the loaves, Jesus stays with the Father on the mountain, while the disciples struggle in vain on the lake with the wind and the waves. Jesus comes to them across the water. Peter hurries toward Him and is saved from sinking by the Lord. Then Jesus climbs into the boat, and the wind lets up. The text continues: "And the ship's crew came and said, falling at His feet, "Thou are indeed the Son of God"" (Mt 14:33, Knox version). Other translations say: "[The disciples] in the boat worshiped [Jesus], saying . . ." (RSV). Both translations are correct. Each emphasizes one aspect of what is going on. The Knox version brings out the bodily expression, while the RSV shows what is happening interiorly. It is perfectly clear from the structure of the narrative that the gesture of acknowledging Jesus as the Son of God is an act of worship.
- d. We encounter a similar set of problems in Saint John's Gospel when we read the account of the healing of the man born blind. This narrative, which is structured in a truly "theo-dramatic" way, ends with a dialogue between Jesus and the man He has healed. It serves as a model for the dialogue of conversion, for the whole narrative must also be seen as a profound exposition of the existential and theological significance of Baptism.
- e. In the dialogue, Jesus asks the man whether he believes in the Son of Man. The man born blind replies: "Tell me who He is, Lord". When Jesus says, "It is He who is speaking to you", the man makes a confession of faith: "I do believe, Lord", and then he "[falls] down to worship Him" (Jn 9:35-38, Knox version, adapted). Earlier translations said: "He worshiped Him". In fact, the whole scene is directed toward the act of faith and the worship of Jesus, which follows from it. Now the eyes of the heart, as well as of the body, are opened. The man has in truth begun to see.

- f. For the exegesis of the text it is important to note that the word *proskynein* occurs eleven times in Saint John's Gospel, of which nine occurrences are found in Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman by Jacob's well (Jn 4:19-24). This conversation is entirely devoted to the theme of worship, and it is indisputable that here, as elsewhere in Saint John's Gospel, the word always has the meaning of "worship". Incidentally, this conversation, too, ends — like that of the healing of the man born blind — with Jesus' revealing Himself: "I who speak to you am He" (Jn 4:26).
- g. I have lingered over these texts, because they bring to light something important. In the two passages that we looked at most closely, the spiritual and bodily meanings of *proskynein* are really inseparable. The bodily gesture itself is the bearer of the spiritual meaning, which is precisely that of worship. Without the worship, the bodily gesture would be meaningless, which the spiritual act must of its very nature, because of the psychosomatic unity of man, express itself in the bodily gesture.
- h. The two aspects are united in the one word, because in a very profound way they belong together. When kneeling becomes merely external, a merely physical act, it becomes meaningless. On the other hand, when someone tries to take worship back into the purely spiritual realm and refuses to give it embodied form, the act of worship evaporates, for what is purely spiritual is inappropriate to the nature of man. Worship is one of those fundamental acts that affect the whole man. That is why bending the knee before the presence of the living God is something we cannot abandon.
- i. Particularly important for our question is the account of the martyrdom of Saint Stephen. The first man to witness to Christ with his blood is described in his suffering as a perfect image of Christ, whose Passion is repeated in the martyrdom of the witness, even in small details. One of these is that Stephen, on his knees, takes up the petition of the crucified Christ: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (7:60). We should remember that Luke, unlike Matthew and Mark, speaks of the Lord kneeling in Gethsemane, which shows that Luke wants the kneeling of the first martyr to be seen as his entry into the prayer of Jesus. Kneeling is not only a Christian gesture, but a Christological one.

3. The Name Above All Names

- a. For me, the most important passages for the theology of kneeling will always be the great hymn of Christ in Philippians 2:6-11. In this pre-Pauline hymn, we hear and see the prayer of the apostolic Church and can discern within it her confession of faith in Christ. However, we also hear the voice of the Apostle, who enters into this prayer and hands it on to us, and, ultimately, we perceive here both the profound inner unity of the Old and New Testaments and the cosmic breadth of Christian faith.
- b. The hymn presents Christ as the antitype of the First Adam. While the latter high-handedly grasped at likeness to God, Christ does not count equality with God, which is His by nature, "a thing to be grasped", but humbles Himself unto death, even death on the Cross. It is precisely this humility, which comes from love, that is the truly divine reality and procures for Him the "name which is above every other name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Phil 2:5-10).
- c. Here the hymn of the apostolic Church takes up the words of promise in Isaiah 45:23: "By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in

righteousness a word that shall not return: "To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." In the interweaving of Old and New Testaments, it becomes clear that, even as crucified, Jesus bears that "name above every name" — the name of the Most High — and is Himself God by nature. Through Him, through the Crucified, the bold promise of the Old Testament is now fulfilled: all bend the knee before Jesus, the One who descended, and bow to Him precisely as the one true God above all gods. The Cross has become the world-embracing sign of God's presence, and all that we have previously heard about the historic and cosmic Christ should now, in this passage, come back into our minds.

- vi. The Christian Liturgy is a cosmic Liturgy precisely because it bends the knee before the crucified and exalted Lord. Here is the center of authentic culture — the culture of truth. The humble gesture by which we fall at the feet of the Lord inserts us into the true path of life of the cosmos.
- vii. There is much more that we might add. For example, there is the touching story told by Eusebius in his history of the Church as a tradition going back to Hegesippus in the second century. Apparently, Saint James, the "brother of the Lord", the first bishop of Jerusalem and "head" of the Jewish Christian Church, had a kind of callous on his knees, because he was always on his knees worshipping God and begging forgiveness for his people (2, 23, 6). Again, there is a story that comes from the sayings of the Desert Fathers, according to which the devil was compelled by God to show himself to a certain Abba Apollo. He looked black and ugly, with frighteningly thin limbs, but most strikingly, he had no knees. The inability to kneel is seen as the very essence of the diabolical.
- viii. But I do not want to go into more detail. I should like to make just one more remark. The expression used by Saint Luke to describe the kneeling of Christians (theis ta gonata) is unknown in classical Greek. We are dealing here with a specifically Christian word. With that remark, our reflections turn full circle to where they began. It may well be that kneeling is alien to modern culture — insofar as it is a culture, for this culture has turned away from the faith and no longer knows the one before whom kneeling is the right, indeed the intrinsically necessary gesture. The man who learns to believe learns also to kneel, and a faith or a liturgy no longer familiar with kneeling would be sick at the core. Where it has been lost, kneeling must be rediscovered, so that, in our prayer, we remain in fellowship with the apostles and martyrs, in fellowship with the whole cosmos, indeed in union with Jesus Christ Himself. This is not merely an issue of faith seeking the consolation of the Presence, but of a faith that deepens itself, or is deepened and rendered more fruitful when the Presence is adored.

9. Concluding thoughts

- a. Address to priests in Poland, May 25, 2006
 - i. "In a world where there is so much noise, so much bewilderment, there is a need for silent adoration of Jesus concealed in the Host. Be assiduous in the prayer of adoration and teach it to the faithful. It is a source of comfort and light, particularly to those who are suffering.
- b. Address to priests in Rome, March 2, 2006
 - i. "We have now rediscovered, however, that without adoration as an act consequent to Communion received, this centre which the Lord gave to us, that is, the possibility of celebrating his sacrifice and thus of entering into a sacramental, almost corporeal, communion with him, loses its depth as well as its human richness."
 - ii. "Adoration means entering the depths of our hearts in communion with the Lord, who makes himself bodily present in the Eucharist. In the monstrance, he always entrusts himself to us and asks us to be united with his Presence, with his risen Body."
- c. God is near us
 - i. Benedict 16 loves to quote Deuteronomy 4:7, which is fundamentally about the joy and

holy pride the Jews have in the law as a gift from God. He applies it *a fortiori* to the gift of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist: “What great nation is there, that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us? Let us beseech the Lord to reawaken in us the joy at his presence and that we may once more adore him. Without adoration, there is no transformation of the world.”