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Archbishop Gomez Addresses the 2016 Conference of the Society of Catholic Liturgy

The annual conference of the Society of Catholic Liturgy took place on September 29-October 1, 2016 at the Our Lady of the Angels Cathedral & Conference Center in Los Angeles, California, dedicated to the theme The Liturgy and the New Evangelization. Rev. Andrew Menke, Secretariat Associate Director, presented an update on the activities of the Committee on Divine Worship. Los Angeles Archbishop José H. Gomez gave the keynote address to the gathering, which is reprinted below for the benefit of our readers:

My friends, ¡bienvenidos! I am really happy to welcome you to the City of the Angels! Los Angeles is the largest Catholic community in the United States and probably the most diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, economic status and even geography. We have about 5 million Catholics here and we cover a territory that is larger than the state of New Jersey, and within this territory, we have some of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the United States and some of the poorest. This great diversity is the context for my talk tonight.

In my five years here in Los Angeles, I have come to see something. I have come to see that the future of the Catholic Church in this country – the future of the Catholic Church in the American continent – is already “here now” in Los Angeles. If you want to know what the Church is going to look like throughout the Americas, and if you want to know what that means – for how we worship, how we serve, how we form priests and disciples, and how we evangelize and engage the culture – this is the place you need to come. So to begin, I need to give you a quick overview of the Church here.

Los Angeles was originally called *El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Ángeles de Porciúncula*, given this name by the Franciscan missionaries, who came here about a decade before the Declaration of Independence. America’s newest saint, St. Junípero Serra, had a hand in founding the Church here. From the beginning, the Church here was multi-cultural and multi-racial. The original families of the Pueblo included Africans, Indians, Europeans, and Asians from the Pacific Islands. And this pattern has continued. Today, as I said, we have about 5 million Catholics. About 70 percent are Latinos, but we have big populations from almost every country in Latin and South America, Asia, Africa, Oceania, Europe and the Middle East. We celebrate the liturgy here in more than 40 different languages. It is really amazing here. You can see how the seeds of the Gospel

have been sown in every culture. And you can see how these seeds have borne rich fruit: in popular piety, in songs and customs, in artwork and poetry, in unique devotions to the Blessed Mother and to national saints.

I want to talk about all of that tonight. But my first point is that Los Angeles is a city of the world, a metropolis. It is also a culture of encounter, and it is an encounter of cultures. But we need to understand that what is happening in Los Angeles is happening all across the country and all across the Americas.

Globalization and the Signs of the Times

My friends, the reality of globalization is one of the “signs” of the times. The globalization process is economic and it’s financial. But globalization is also social and cultural. The patterns of mass migration that we see in every part of the Americas, and every part of the world, are bringing about a new encounter and a new “mixing” of cultures. Our societies are now profoundly diverse. Multi-racial and multi-cultural. This is not an ideological statement. It’s demographics. And all of this has implications for the Church, as I said, for our worship and for our liturgy, and for our mission of evangelization.

In fact, my friends, I believe we are living in a providential moment. A time of real missionary opportunity and hope. I believe we are living in a moment where it is possible for us to really see what God intended for his creation from the beginning: one family of God drawn from every nation, race, language and people.

In the mystery of God’s plan, the Church is intended to *a global Church*. Worldwide, universal. That is what “catholic” means, a single family embracing the whole of humanity. And the Church today has the same mission she received at Pentecost: to proclaim “the mighty works of God” to men and women “from every nation under heaven.” The Church is called to be a *sacrament*, the *sign* of the single family that the Father in his love wants to create in his Son, and the Church is called to be the *instrument* by which all the peoples of the world realize their identity as God’s children and as brothers and sisters in his universal family, his Kingdom on earth.

Liturgy and the Church’s Mission

The Church has a great opportunity right now for the New Evangelization of our continent and world. Over the last 2,000 years, the Gospel has been inculturated in “every nation under heaven.” This means the Church today is able to truly worship, teach and evangelize in one voice, as one family of God, drawn from every nation, people and language, united in our faith in the Gospel and our communion with the Holy Father in Rome. To be Catholic today means we can pray in every language and express our faith through countless regional and ethnic traditions. We are heirs to the authentic Catholic traditions of every culture. I don’t think we fully understand just what a beautiful blessing this is! And what a powerful resource we have for evangelization.

At the heart of everything in the Church is the divine liturgy, the Eucharistic celebration. It is always wonderful to pray as a Catholic. Because when we celebrate the Eucharist, we are joined in prayer with the family of God in every part of our country, in every part of the world. In the Eucharist we are all joined together in the worship of God with the angels and saints in heaven. When we come together to worship in the Eucharist, we do not know ourselves as Greeks or Jews, or Latinos or Anglos, or Filipinos or Vietnamese. In the liturgy we are united as brothers and sisters, children of the one Father who calls us in love. The Eucharist is always the “ordinary means” of sanctification, the ordinary way by which people grow in holiness and move towards heaven.

Lex orandi, lex credendi. In the Church’s ancient formula, we pray what we believe, and what we pray changes us into what we believe. We are made in the image of God and given the vocation to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. This beautiful promise of our faith shapes the direction of our Christian lives. We become what we pray. Little by little and day by day, we are being changed into his likeness, St. Paul said, until one day we can say with Paul, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”

This transformation is taking place quietly through our participation in the divine liturgy as it unfolds Sunday by Sunday in the rhythms and cycles of the Church's liturgical year. Through the liturgy, we enter into those sacred mysteries, joining our lives to his life. In a sense, we can say that the Church's mission is to lead people to the table of the Eucharist. So the question of the New Evangelization is: how do we do that? How do we bring people to this life-changing encounter with Christ in the divine liturgy?

Popular Piety and the New Evangelization

I want to suggest that we have a precious treasure in the Church's traditions of popular piety – all the ways that Catholics in every culture express their faith, all their different ways of praying, all their devotions, customs and saints. We know of course, that true popular piety is rooted in the Eucharist and leads to the worship of Christ in his Body and Blood. But I think too often we overlook popular piety. We dismiss it as kind of naïve, a superstition, or a form of “magical thinking.”

But, my friends, what I see here in Los Angeles is something beautiful. The faith of the people is expressed in countless humble ways: kissing their fingers after they make the Sign of the Cross, crossing themselves when they pass by a Church. There so many different ways that our people make their faith a natural part of their ordinary daily lives. This is popular piety, and we need to appreciate it as liturgists, as pastors, as theologians. And I believe that all these ways that people express their humble faith in God can be an important resource for the New Evangelization.

In popular piety, we see how the Gospel becomes “incarnate” in different cultures, how the encounter with Christ transforms and purifies those cultures from within. To use the image of Jesus, as the Gospel enters the human heart like a “seed,” in the same way, the Gospel is planted in the “soil” of a culture. The truths of the Gospel become part of the “feeling” of the people, their customs and traditions, shaping the way they see the world and understand their place within it.

Popular piety is the faith of the family of God, and when we reflect on it, I think we see that the devotions of the people reflect a kind of “family faith.” I am struck by how much of popular piety is rooted in the rhythms of family life and in people's reflection on the humanity of the Holy Family. There is something that is deeply touching, a tender humanism in these devotions. We see how people feel that Jesus, Mary and Joseph are close to them; that they understand the joys and the struggles and the sufferings that we go through in our families and in our daily lives.

One example: There is a very old popular devotion in Latin America, especially in Mexico, called *Las Posadas*. It is a novena that we celebrate nine days before Christmas. Every night for those nine days, families get together and they re-create the journey that Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus make on their way to Bethlehem. A couple of years ago in Los Angeles, some families here turned their *Posada* into a beautiful emotional reflection on the sufferings of undocumented immigrants and their families.

It was really moving. The whole story of how Mary and Joseph could find no room at the inn on that first Christmas; these families saw that as *their story*. They saw the Holy Family sharing in what they were going through, in not being able to find welcome in this country. And witnessing this devotion, you get the powerful sense that because the Holy Family has suffered these things, it lends dignity and hope to their sufferings. There is a sense in this devotion that they understand God's love, and that God is with them. That's one example. Let me give you another.

Our Filipino brothers and sisters have a beautiful Easter devotion they call *Salubong* (“The Encounter”). Gathering before dawn, they relive the meeting of the Risen Jesus with his Blessed Mother on the first Easter morning. Of course in the Gospels, there is no mention of this meeting between Jesus and Mary after his Resurrection. But popular faith sometimes starts where the Scriptures leave off. And again, we have to think about the power that this devotion can have for families. Many parents have lost children or loved

ones, and Easter is the promise of new life. So I think in this devotion we have a really beautiful expression of Christian faith in the Resurrection.

People are identifying with Mary as a mother – as a mother who has lost her Son, a mother who is in mourning. So this devotion expresses people's faith that death is not the end, that we will be reunited with those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith. As Jesus came back to Mary, Jesus will give our loved ones back to us in the joy of the Resurrection. It is a beautiful expression of faith, and here are many more examples we could mention: we could talk all night, for instance, about the various devotions to local saints.

Conclusion

My point tonight is that these popular devotions are a rich source for communicating the power of the Gospel. They are not a substitute for the divine liturgy, but they are a means for communicating the good news of God's love and preparing people's hearts for the encounter of Christ in the Eucharist.

My friends, despite the widespread secularization of our societies, we see that people are still hungry for God. They long to make contact with him. They long to know his love and power in their lives. They are searching for spiritualities that will bring them holiness and wholeness and communion with God and other people. And I think popular piety speaks to this spiritual hunger, this restlessness, in a deep way. In a world where people no longer seem to sense God's nearness, popular devotions and customs are a concrete way to communicate God's mercy, his tenderness towards us.

So my prayer and my hope is that all of us in the Church will reflect more deeply on the beautiful diversity of the Church, all the different continents and peoples and languages and ethnic backgrounds and traditions. I really believe there is evangelical power in the different ways that our people pray and express their faith. As ministers in the Church and pastors, my hope is that we will be looking for creative ways that we can use this treasure of popular piety to lead people to the sacred liturgy, to the encounter with Christ, to the participation in his Body and Blood and to become partakers of the divine life.

Let me leave you with just a reminder. You are close to one of the greatest examples of popular piety in the universal Church. As many of you noticed, in our Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, we have a chapel devoted to Our Lady of Guadalupe. In that chapel there is a small reliquary that holds a tiny piece of cloth cut from the sacred *tilma*, the cloak of St. Juan Diego that bears the miraculous image of the Virgin. People come there all day long: not only Latinos, but Anglos and Asians and Africans, everybody. They come to pray and they bring their children and their parents and great-grandparents. Some like to touch their rosaries and other items to the relic.

Their devotion is not magic or superstition. This is true faith, deep faith. Through this devotion, they know that they have a mother in heaven, a mother who cares, a mother who is watching over her children. They feel their connection with God. They know that as God spoke through the Virgin to Juan Diego, he is still involved in the world today. They know that he is still close to us in his mercy, and they know that God is especially near to those who are poor and those who are oppressed and suffering. I think through this devotion, the people also in some way identify themselves with Juan Diego, a humble Indian man with responsibilities for his family, an ordinary man who became a messenger for God, a missionary disciple. And as we know, through St. Juan Diego, this humble Indian man, Christianity spread throughout the Americas and a new Christian civilization was born.

This is the power of popular devotion, the potential for popular piety at this time in our history. I think it can inspire a new generation of disciples – a new generation of saints and missionaries – to build a new world of faith in the Americas.

Bishop Seitz's Address to the 2016 National Meeting of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions

The 2016 National Meeting of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions took place in Albany, New York on October 5-7, 2016. Delegates from eighty-five U.S. dioceses considered the theme Open Wide the Gates of Justice: Praise God Within Them. The relationship between the Church's liturgy and its impetus to promote social justice was considered, assisted by major presentations from El Paso Bishop Mark J. Seitz, Dr. Diana Hayes, and Rev. Mark Francis, CSV. The Msgr. Frederick R. McManus Award for 2016 was presented to Rev. Jan Michael Joncas.

Bishop Seitz also provided the delegates with a presentation on the Committee on Divine Worship's latest activities. His thoughtful reflection, delivered after the presentation of news and events, is reproduced here for the benefit of our readers:

One positive that came out of the roll-out of the third edition of the *Roman Missal* in English back in 2011 is that it initiated a long conversation about "best practices" when it comes to celebrating the Mass or any other liturgy. Although there is still much work to be done in this area, the results of that conversation have been largely positive.

In the not-so-distant past, what was regarded as good liturgy planning often consisted of creatively inventing new elements for the Mass or other liturgy, often at the expense of the primary elements of word, unified gesture, bread and wine, etc. In the years since 2011, in my experience, it seems that much more emphasis is placed on doing what the rite calls for as well as they can be done, rather than reinterpreting and misinterpreting the signs which are a permanent and essential part of the Mass.

I am hoping and praying that the series of workshops organized by this FDLC and presented to communities all over the country will result in a similar ongoing conversation on the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (OCM). It's no secret to anyone here that planning weddings presents its own set of challenges when it comes to balancing the varied options the Church envisions with the expectations of the couples, who are often getting their inspiration not from learned books on celebrating Matrimony, but on the latest fashions and fads presented on TV, in movies, and on YouTube.

One of the treasures of the new OCM is the greatly expanded Introduction. This introduction contains not only instructions for the proper execution of the rites, but even more importantly, you will find there some extensive new language on the theology and nature of marriage, together with the roles of clergy, family, and even parish communities in preparing couples for marriage.

I submit that if everyone were to read and understand those first 27 paragraphs of the Introduction to the OCM, there would be vastly fewer requests for the latest Hallmark wedding product, or for the playing of a CD with the couple's favorite love song during the ceremony. If we clergy were teaching those first 27 paragraphs as part of our ongoing homiletic catechesis, and the primary symbols and signs of the OCM – the holding of hands, the rings on the fingers, the words of consent exchanged, not to mention the Eucharist itself when Mass is celebrated – there would be far less desire for the extraneous or the superficial.

My hope is that this, like any new text, is received as an invitation to re-examine the way we "always do weddings," even though some of the new elements – like perhaps the acclamation dialogue after the Reception of Consent, or the greater encouragement to include singing and participation by the assembly – serve as an invitation to "give it a try" rather than write it off as something we've never done before.

In these challenging times, when the number of couples seeking Matrimony within the Church has dropped precipitously, we can no longer say the old ways we are used to work just fine. Perhaps we can try something new and revolutionary: being more attentive to what the Church is actually asking us to do in weddings.

As we all know, preparing for good, effective wedding liturgies that respect the principal elements the Church is asking us to emphasize, and which do not get swept away in a tsunami of fads, conspicuous consumption, and superficiality can be challenging, especially in view of how often we are called to work with couples who have little contact with our parishes and with liturgies otherwise. Sometimes we have to be patient; sometimes we have to make pastoral judgments that stretch the rules a little; of course we are always called to be appropriately *creative*. Without an appropriate adaptation to culture and place a liturgy is sterile and foreign. Culture is a language, a source of identity and self-understanding as well as communication, which has its special vernacular.

Everyone in this room, in some way or another, is involved in the planning and execution of liturgies. Do you ever feel, as I do, that we are engaged in some kind of difficult balancing act between two extremes? Here are the two extremes I am taking about:

- Executing a liturgy in a very casual and free-spirited manner, where the General Instructions and rubrics, if heeded at all, are relegated to a kind of “ideal” status that was never really meant to be followed;

or there’s the other extreme —

- Planning and executing a liturgy which is strictly, almost obsessively, by the book. Everything is “correct” in the literal sense, but the resulting liturgy can be overburdened with rubrical details, almost robotic, at the expense of helping the assembly to realize that they are participants in the divine liturgy, not just spectators of some grand liturgical machine.

We err when we think these are the only choices we have. The Church has gone to great pains to ensure that the People of God who gather for Mass or any other liturgy experience the liturgy that the Church had in mind, not a wild creation of the planners or the celebrants. I would suggest that a better word for what happens in advance of a liturgical celebration is not “planning,” but rather “preparation,” since the liturgy is not something that is “created” as much as it is something that is enacted. At the same time, the Church clearly recognizes that the assembly is not sanctified by contact with liturgy, but is sanctified and transformed by full entrance into the liturgy.

One of the most ignored or overused instructions in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) is paragraph 24: “[T]he Priest will remember that he is the servant of the Sacred Liturgy and that he himself is not permitted, on his own initiative, to add, to remove, or to change anything in the celebration of the Mass.” (This statement was actually taken from the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 22, so it has a significant pedigree!)

Taken by itself, this important instruction might seem to favor the second extreme I mentioned a moment ago, where a liturgy is to be done precisely and meticulously, but often without heart or appropriate adaptation to time and place. However, anyone who takes a few moments to look carefully and without some preconceived prejudice at the *Roman Missal* will quickly realize that not all Masses were ever meant to look and sound alike any more than those who celebrate do. Variety and adaptation are built in. It is really no exaggeration to speculate that a priest could live through his entire priestly ministry without having celebrated the Mass exactly the same twice. Such variety and even creativity is quite possible without “adding, removing, or changing” anything in the Mass.

It would take way too much time to expound on every feature of the Mass which can be varied according to occasion and circumstance, but let’s just review a few of them so that we are all on the same page.

Language

Back in the late 1960s when the first vernacular Missals were being published and used, Pope Paul VI famously said that the scores of vernacular languages would now become “the voice of the Church,” a voice which had for centuries before been assumed to speak Latin only. While Latin retains pride of place in our

Roman Catholic tradition, attention to the languages spoken and understood by the faithful of any given community must be given careful consideration.

Music

This is perhaps the most noticeable area where great flexibility and creativity can be applied, or even expected. Although each of us probably has his or her “favorite” style of church music, the Church, while continuing to uphold Gregorian chant as having “pride of place,” nonetheless has taken great pains to instruct us that a wide variety is admissible, as long as it is appropriate and reflective of Church teaching and theology.

Perhaps as in no other aspect of liturgy does culture and even language play such a deciding role. The GIRM itself speaks of four options for the entrance procession (no. 48): 1) the proper antiphon chanted or intoned using text either from the *Missal* or from the *Graduale Romanum*; 2) the antiphon and Psalm from another liturgical resource called the *Graduale Simplex*; 3) a “chant” from any other approved collection of antiphons and Psalms; and 4) any other approved chant (meaning anything sung: song, hymn) that is suited to the day, the season, and the sacred action.

Quality and appropriateness of the text, the music and its performance by the music ministers still call for our careful reflection, but we still have an enormous area of creativity and variety gifted to us without altering or taking liberties with the liturgy.

Progressive Solemnity

This is the well-known but often ignored principle that a Mass on a Tuesday morning in Ordinary Time at 7:00 AM is not celebrated with the same pomp and solemnity as the Easter Vigil or Pentecost. While we would never want to reduce any liturgy to merely the bare minimum required, the days on which we have more, and the days on which we keep things simpler, should reflect the importance of the day and the event. Instead of succumbing to a bland base-line for nearly all our liturgical celebrations, we should more consciously and creatively apply the principle of progressive solemnity to say something about the importance of the day. There is an appropriate ebb and flow to our liturgical cycle.

Options within the Order of Mass

During the recent FDLG workshops introducing the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, many commented on certain “new features” of the Rite. Some were indeed new, but others that may have seemed new, like the inclusion of an “entrance song” at weddings, has been there all along, perhaps unnoticed or ignored.

Speaking again of liturgies in general, those of us who preside and assist at liturgies should be instructed, yes, but we should also be willing to carve out time to *review* the available legitimate options from time to time, and perhaps even use some that we haven’t before. Again, there would be too many to list comprehensively, but some of the options in the *Ordo Missæ* are as follows:

- Several options for the greeting at Mass.
- Numerous options for the Penitential Act, including the *Confiteor* as well as the numerous invocations which are options for the Penitential Act: “Lord Jesus, you came to gather the nations into the peace of God’s kingdom: Lord have mercy.” And many more. There is also the perfectly good option which we almost never use: “Have mercy on us, O Lord. / For we have sinned against you. Show us, O Lord, your mercy. / And grant us your salvation.”
- Brief monitions at appropriate points and moments of silence.
- **The Liturgy of the Word** – On some days of the year, especially during Ordinary Time, a presider can celebrate with a wide variety of Mass prayers and take advantage of many options for the readings, too. Do we succumb to the temptation to go with whatever is printed in the missalette, even though we may have numerous other options?
- **The Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful)** – Although the *Missal* includes some sample sets of intercessions, by its very nature, the Universal Prayer should reflect the needs of the community and events in the world around it. We can stand to be a lot more creative and sensitive with these

intercessions. How unfortunate it is for a community to be invited day after day and week after week to pray pre-published generic prayers provided by publishers, and written months if not years before. This is one feature where creativity is not just permitted, it is expected.

- **Preparation of the Gifts** – The liturgy itself admits many options to how and by whom the bread and wine for use in the Mass is conveyed to the altar. The ones who are asked to bring the gifts to the priest or deacon should vary and be representative of the entire parish or diocesan community. Financial offerings should be included and we need to find ways to include those who now give via bank drafts and other means. The sign of the gifts coming from the assembly to the altar is so important in my opinion that it should never be omitted.
- **Eucharistic Prayers** – On most weekday and Sunday Masses, except for a few major solemnities and feasts, there are options for the Preface texts to be used. Presently for the dioceses in the United States, there are no fewer than 13 Eucharistic Prayers approved for use, including the “main” ones (I-IV), two for Reconciliation, four for Various Needs and Occasions, and three for Masses with children. Despite this variety and this wealth of powerful eucharological language, we too easily fall into the trap of praying Eucharistic Prayer III on Sundays and Eucharistic Prayer II on weekdays without additional thought or reflection. Equally troubling are those who have decided on their own authority that only Eucharistic Prayer I may be used. To be clear, by eliminating the other 12 approved options, the priest has taken it upon himself to “remove” something from the celebration of Mass, contrary to paragraph 24 in the GIRM. The opposite extreme should also raise concern: those presiders who never employ the first Eucharistic Prayer.
- Creativity can and should be legitimately applied here, too: using the Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation during Lent is a no-brainer; the Eucharistic Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions are all too easily overlooked. And let us not overlook the various formulae provided for the dismissal and blessing at the end of the Mass.
- On special commemorations like Palm Sunday, the *Missal* itself provides several options for the blessing and procession of palms. Some days, like on the Commemoration of All Souls, the celebrant has three sets of Mass prayers and numerous readings to choose from. Perhaps we could all stand to give a little more thought and discernment as to which of these options best serves our communities in light of, for example, recent tragedies or death, rather than simply going to our favorite ones every year.

I have focused on areas of creativity within the Mass. If time permitted we could include examine every liturgy (sacraments, *Liturgy of the Hours*, funerals, etc.) in search of legitimate options the Church in her wisdom has provided us with, but which often we neglect or ignore.

I hope my reflection here, inspired by some of the new and not-so-new options in the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, has helped illustrate that, when it comes to the Church’s liturgies, one size and shape was never intended to fit all. Indeed, the liturgical books present us with a kind of ritual canvas upon which we can (and should!) paint a slightly different but always appropriate liturgical picture each time, in the light of the needs of our communities. I don’t think I am overstating anything to say that the systematic omission of legitimate options, whether through laziness or because of personal preference, impoverishes the liturgy and keeps it from becoming fully what it was meant to be.

In the not-too-distant past, good liturgy preparation was thought to be a moment when clever things were *added* to the liturgy to make it “interesting” and “meaningful.” Unfortunately, such liturgical freestyling often said more about the persons planning and presiding at the liturgy than it did about the Risen Lord being worshipped and praised within the Body of Christ, the Church. I would recommend that the question should be changed from “What can we add or change?” to “How can we celebrate the liturgy in its fullness here and now within the Church?”

As we have seen, the choices are almost infinite. And in our creativity we really don’t need to *invent* a thing!