



March 21, 2006

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

When I began my ministry as your shepherd nearly seven years ago, I stood before you and committed myself to deepening four essential aspects of our mission together as members of the Church: evangelization, reconciliation, unity, and service. Today, I count myself abundantly blessed to see growth in each of these areas. Along the way, I have sought to listen and to respond to your concerns, among them two matters which relate to our worship: the 1962 Latin Mass and the service of girls and women at the altar.

***In Essentials, Unity: United in the Eucharist***

Before he departed this life, our beloved John Paul II called us in the recent Year of the Eucharist (Oct. 2004-Oct. 2005) to reflect on how the liturgy is celebrated in our parish communities. In particular, he prayed for a “revival in all Christian communities of the celebration of Sunday Mass and an increase in Eucharistic worship outside Mass” (*Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 29). The Sunday Mass, he wrote, “brings together the entire parish community” (*Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 21). I too have prayed for such revival and unity in our worship together; for, unified in our worship and nourished by the Eucharist, we will be more effective disciples to a world in need. To paraphrase Blessed John XXIII, whose words seem to speak to this need for unity and charity: in essential matters, unity; in optional matters, liberty; and in all matters, charity (cf. *Ad Petri Cathedram*, 72).

Together we marked the Year of the Eucharist in our diocese through prayerful reflection, worship, and Eucharistic Adoration. In my own prayer and reflection on our liturgy during and after this year in the life of our Church, I have come to the conclusion that I must extend to you, the people of God in my care, those liberties permitted by the Catholic Church. In allowing these options, my prayer is twofold: first, that the riches of our Catholic faith may be available to an ever greater number of our faithful; second, given that these options concern our common liturgy, my prayer is that our celebration of the “source and summit of the Christian life” (*Lumen Gentium*, 11), the Eucharist, will ever more become the focal point of our lives.

***In Optional Matters, Liberty: Extending Liberty Where the Roman Catholic Church Allows***

***1962 Latin Mass***

As your bishop, I am charged with meeting your spiritual and pastoral needs. As in many other dioceses, our flock includes those drawn to the Church's rich Latin liturgical tradition. In response to the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1963-65), a revised missal was promulgated by Pope Paul VI, and translations in the vernacular were subsequently published. In the 1980s, the Holy See, recognizing the "rightful aspirations" (*Ecclesia Dei*, 5) of those drawn to traditional Mass of St. Pius V (as revised in 1962), allowed bishops to permit the celebration of the 1962 Latin Mass in their dioceses. Pope John Paul II encouraged a "wide and generous application" (*Ecclesia Dei*, 6) of the Church's permission to celebrate the 1962 Latin Mass. Reflecting on these matters over the course of the Year of the Eucharist and wishing to make available to the faithful all of the options which the Church permits, effective April 30 at St. Lawrence Church in Alexandria and August 6 at St. John the Baptist Church in Front Royal, I will extend the Church's permission to allow the use of the 1962 Missal at one Mass each Sunday at those locations.

With the celebration of the 1962 Mass offered alongside the revised missal of Pope Paul VI, some may wonder whether the Church is opposing one form of worship to another. Addressing that concern, our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI (then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger) wrote, "Different spiritual and theological emphases will continue to exist, but they will no longer be two opposing ways of being Christian. They will be, rather, the riches which belong to the same unique Catholic faith" (Ten Years of the *Motu Proprio* 'Ecclesia Dei,' 1998). Recognizing the riches which the 1962 Latin Mass offers, I pray that the spiritual needs and aspirations of those drawn to this liturgy will be met.

***Expansion of Our Previous Permission of Female Altar Servers***

In addition to reflecting upon the celebration of the 1962 Latin Mass in the course of the Year of the Eucharist, I have similarly reflected on our present policy regarding altar servers. Since 1994, our diocese has permitted girls and women to serve at the altar in several settings: university and college campuses, convents, nursing homes, retreat houses, hospitals, and home Masses. In desiring to make available those legitimate options endorsed by our Church, I am expanding our previous permission to include our parish and high school communities.

Some parishes have actively requested the liberty to allow female altar servers; others have not. The Church's permission in this arena, accordingly, allows for a legitimate diversity of options. The decision to allow female altar servers lies at the discretion of the local pastor, in consultation with his parochial vicar(s), deacon(s), and parish pastoral council.

The Church – which has allowed the use of female servers for over a decade – has stated that girls and women, like their male counterparts, are allowed this opportunity to serve at the altar and thereby deepen their faith, an experience which can facilitate a young woman’s discernment of the Lord’s call to religious life or a young man’s discernment of the Lord’s call to the priesthood or religious life.

***In All Things, Charity: Reflecting the Love of Jesus Christ***

Please join me in my continued prayer that we as a diocesan Church on pilgrimage will be an ever greater witness to the world in which we live. May we move forward unified in the essentials; and in all things, may the charity to which Jesus Christ calls us be evident in our lives.

Faithfully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Paul S. Loverde". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Rev. Paul S. Loverde  
Bishop of Arlington