

Living Liturgy: the Vision of Vatican II

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The past couple of years have seen a number of golden jubilees in connection with the Second Vatican Council. I would mention two in particular. October 2012 saw the fiftieth anniversary of the start of the council, when Pope John XXIII gave his opening address to the great gathering of bishops in St Peter's Basilica. December last year saw the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of the Council's first major document: the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*.

Those of us who are over fifty ourselves may remember those occasions personally. For those who are under fifty, these anniversaries concern events that we might read about in history books or see in a TV documentary on the history channel. For some people the Second Vatican Council might be a complete mystery. I heard the story of one young man who was puzzled by the name "Vatican II". He asked: "Vatican II? Is that the name of the Pope's yacht?"

In my reflections this evening, I will be making a number of references to Vatican II, not as a possible name for a papal yacht but as the abbreviated name of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, the gathering of over 2000 bishops that was held in Rome over four sessions between 1962 and 1965. In particular I would like to offer some thoughts on the vision of Vatican II in regard to liturgy.

Vatican II and the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

On 4th December 1963, at the conclusion of the Council's second session, Pope Paul VI and the other bishops gathered in St Peter's for the formal publication of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*.

That document was the fruit of lengthy discussions during the first two sessions of the Council. It also drew on an appreciation of liturgy that had been developing for many years before the Council met.

Growing interest in the liturgy in the 19th and 20th centuries

When he was introducing the revised texts for the Mass in 1969, Pope Paul referred to the growth in interest in the liturgy that had occurred during the previous hundred years or so. He wrote: "A deep interest in fostering the liturgy has become widespread and strong among the Christian people."

An interest in fostering the liturgy had begun to grow in Europe through the nineteenth century. Scholars had been studying the liturgical texts, both the texts in use at the time and some ancient texts that had been rediscovered. While some devoted themselves to the scholarly study of liturgical texts, others gave their energy to publishing more popularly written books for the general Christian community. These were books that sought to explain points about the liturgy and encourage people to pray the prayers of the liturgy in a way that would really nourish their faith.

One example of these popular writers was a priest called Pius Parsch. He published the results of liturgical scholarship in a popular form, in books written in German. One of his books was called *The Liturgy of the Mass*. Another was called *The Church's Year of Grace*. These books were intended to help people appreciate the prayers and ceremonies of the Mass and the cycle of the Church Year so that they might pray more fruitfully.

There developed what came to be called “the liturgical movement” – a movement to promote the good celebration of the liturgy drawing on a deeper understanding of the liturgical rites.

Pope Pius X: liturgy as source of the true Christian spirit

In 1903 Pope Pius X wrote an encyclical that showed that he shared the concern for people’s fruitful participation in the liturgical prayer of the church. The encyclical was written in Italian and is generally referred to by the first words “*Tre le sollecitudini*”, “Among the concerns”.

“Among the concerns of the pastoral office . . . a chief concern is that of maintaining and promoting the decorum of the House of God in which the august mysteries of religion are celebrated, and where the Christian people assemble to receive the grace of the Sacraments, to assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar, to adore the most august Sacrament of the Lord's Body and to unite in the common prayer of the Church in the public and solemn liturgical offices.”

Pope Pius X goes on to speak of active participation in the liturgy as the first and indispensable source of the true Christian spirit.

“As it is our most lively desire that the true Christian spirit flowers anew in every way and is maintained among all the faithful, it is necessary to provide before everything else for the holiness and dignity of the temple, where the faithful assemble to acquire such a spirit from its first and indispensable source (fount), which is the active participation in the most holy mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church.”

Studies of the History of Liturgy

In the years following this encyclical of Pope Pius X there were numerous conferences to promote a deeper appreciation of the liturgy. There was also continuing research into the history of the liturgy.

The illustration on the screen shows an example of the kind of document the historians of liturgy were studying. It is a page from a sacramentary, an eighth century book from France with prayers for the Mass. The text is in Latin. The page here shows the “Sanctus” and the start of the Eucharistic Prayer. The text is very close to texts that are familiar to us – the “Holy, holy” and the First Eucharistic Prayer.

As an aside I would point out that the lettering is slightly different from letters we use today. Another point we might notice is that some words are abbreviated. For example “Sanctus” is written “scs” and “Dominus” is written “dns”. This seems to me to be rather like what we do today with abbreviated words in text messages. So we might see such manuscripts as early versions of texting.

In the years leading up to the Second Vatican Council, historians studied such documents and came to understand more fully the history of liturgy through the centuries.

One of the outstanding fruits of the historical research was a two volume history of the Mass written by a Jesuit priest, Father Joseph Jungmann. The original was in German. The English translation is called “The Mass of the Roman Rite”.

One of the notable features of this work was that it was written in the middle of the Second World War. In his introduction to the book, Josef Jungmann refers to the fact that the seminary where he was teaching was shut down because of the war and this gave him time to focus on his research. I would like to quote from his account of those days.

“When the theological faculty at Innsbruck was abolished a few months after the invasion of the Nazi forces into Austria, the business of teaching could at first be carried on, at least in essentials and with scarcely a diminution of students, outside the confines of the University. But then came the second blow. On October 12, 1939 the Collegium Maximum was closed and given up, along with the Canisianum which had already been seized. But only a few days later, even before my departure from Innsbruck, I made up my mind to dedicate the time thus left free to me to an exposition of the Mass-liturgy. For that seemed to me to be the theme most useful to handle in a time of stress like this.”

At first he worked at his research in Vienna but then he moved to a quiet country spot where he could work more easily. This is how he describes his move. “I was able to exchange my residence in Vienna for one in the country – an ideal place, considering the conditions of war. This was the home of the School Sisters of St Pölten, in Hainstetten, peacefully nestled in fertile hill country. Here, along with the moderate duties in a little church attached to the convent, I was granted not only the undisturbed quiet of a peaceful countryside, but – under the watchful care of the Sisters – all the material conditions conducive to successful labour. The distant rumble of the war – which, it is true, often increased to the whistle of bombs and the shaking of the whole house – served only as an incentive to gather up all my resources in order to prepare for the spiritual reconstruction which was sure to come.”

The result of his studies and writing is a history of the Mass with rich detail about how the rite developed over the centuries. He compared the Mass to a castle that has been built in stages and he commented that by the time he was putting together his history the rite of the Mass had become quite complicated. He wrote: “The liturgy of the Mass has become quite a complicated structure, wherein some details do not seem to fit very well, like some venerable thousand-year-old castle whose crooked corridors and narrow stairways, high towers and large halls appear at first sight strange.” Jungmann suggests that it would be ideal if the Mass could be arranged so that the general plan could be seen more easily.

Just as a castle might be renovated so that the original features might stand out more clearly, so a revision of the rite of the Mass could help us see the main features of the ceremony more readily. At the same time, a good renovation of a castle would make the building suitable as a place to live in today. Likewise, a good renovation of the liturgy would provide a liturgy suitable for people of our time.

Vatican II and reform of the liturgy

We find similar thoughts in the approach to reform of the liturgy at the Second Vatican Council. For example, in paragraph 21 of the *Constitution on the Liturgy* we read about reform of the liturgy in these terms:

“In order that the Christian people may more securely derive an abundance of graces from the sacred liturgy, holy Mother Church desires to undertake with great care a general restoration of the liturgy itself.

“For the liturgy is made up of unchangeable elements divinely instituted, and elements subject to change. The latter not only may but ought to be changed with the passing of time if features have perhaps crept in which are less harmonious with the inner nature of the liturgy, or if existing elements have grown less functional.

“In this restoration, both texts and rites should be drawn up so that they express more clearly the holy things which they signify. Christian people, as far as possible, should be able to understand them with ease and to take part in them fully, actively, and as befits a community.”

We find similar points made when the Council specifically addressed the reform of the rite of the Mass.

“The rite of the Mass is to be revised in such a way that the intrinsic nature and purpose of its several parts, as also the connection between them, can be more clearly manifested, and that devout and active participation by the faithful can be more easily accomplished.

For this purpose the rites are to be simplified, while due care is taken to preserve their substance. Elements which, with the passage of time, came to be duplicated, or were added with but little advantage, are now to be discarded. Where opportunity allows or necessity demands, other elements which have suffered injury through accidents of history are now to be restored to the earlier norm of the holy Fathers.” (par 50)

These words of the Council echo some of the reflections of Joseph Jungmann and other liturgical scholars from the years leading up to the Council but this is not surprising because Joseph Jungmann and other scholars were members of the working groups that developed the Council’s *Constitution on the Liturgy*.

The reform was greatly influenced by historical studies that had made possible a greater appreciation of the history of the liturgy – not just in recent centuries and not just in the Western areas of the Church but across the twenty centuries of Christian worship and across both East and West. In this sense the reform was profoundly conservative. While the reform did introduce elements that were new for people at the time, they were often elements that had been recovered from the Church’s ancient liturgical practice.

Reform inspired by ancient traditions

This is a point that was made by John O’Malley in his book “What happened at Vatican II”. He was writing about the use of the terms “conservative” and “progressive” in general, but his reflections apply very clearly to the provisions that the Council made regarding the reform of the liturgy. He noted that the bishops who were commonly spoken of as “progressives” because they were promoting reform were in some ways more conservative than those commonly called “conservatives”. This is how John O’Malley expressed this:

“Their positions were more conservative than those of the conservatives because they were retrievals of traditions fundamental and ancient. His Beatitude Maximos IV Saigh (patriarch of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church) articulated this basic premise more clearly than any other figure at the council. He was the most daringly progressive because he was the most radically conservative. His interventions consistently invoked ancient traditions of the church to challenge the status quo, and he thus opened up for the council fathers a new breadth in the choices they had to make.” (*What happened at Vatican II*, p. 292)

The Liturgy and the Overall Aims of the Council

I would also like to observe that the Council saw the reform and promotion of the liturgy as key steps in fulfilling the Council’s overall aims. This was put clearly in the very first paragraph of the *Constitution on the Liturgy*.

“This sacred Council has several aims in view: it desires to impart an ever increasing vigour to the Christian life of the faithful; to adapt more suitably to the needs of our own times those institutions which are subject to change; to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ; to strengthen whatever can help to call the whole of humanity into the household of the Church. The Council therefore sees particularly cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the liturgy.”

The Council wished to promote a **more vigorous Christian life**. As Pope Pius X had said, the liturgy was the indispensable source of the true Christian spirit. Promoting a more fruitful celebration of the liturgy was a key to promoting a more vigorous Christian life.

The Council wished to make some **adaptations to modern times**. Scholars had demonstrated that part of the Church’s adaptation to different times through history had been adaptations in the liturgy. The Council recognized that some elements of the liturgical rites could well be adapted so as to better express for people today the holy things they signify.

The Council wished to foster **unity among Christians**. The more authentic we can be in liturgy, the closer we will come to Christ, and the more authentic all Christians can be in liturgy, the closer we will all come to Christ and consequently the closer we will be to one another. From this point of view, the promotion of liturgical celebrations that truly unite us with Christ will also move us towards that unity with one another for which Christ prayed.

The Council wished to **call the whole of humanity** into the one fold, with Christ as the shepherd. The more the Church’s prayer is true and beautiful, the more likely it will be that people will be drawn to this beautiful communion with God and with one another. Hence, the promotion of liturgy that is true and beautiful can help to make the Christian message more appealing.

From these various points of view, the reform and promotion of the liturgy were keys to fulfilling the basic aims of the Council.

Directives of the Second Vatican Council regarding the revision of the Mass

What specific details did the Council refer to as needing attention in the revision of the Missal? We can summarise them under various headings:

- * More extensive readings from Scripture
(so that people might be more fully nourished by the Word of God)

- * Restoration of the homily
- * Restoration of the Prayer of the Faithful
- * Use of the mother tongue
- * Receiving communion from elements consecrated at the same celebration

- * Communion under both kinds
- * Revision of the rite for concelebration
- * Revision of the calendar, giving more prominence to the celebration of Sundays and the seasons of the Church’s year and reducing the number of celebrations of saints

- * Development of liturgical singing, both by choirs and by the whole congregation, drawing on Gregorian chant and on new compositions in various styles
- * Promotion of liturgical art and architecture suited to the different regions of the world
- * Variations and adaptations to local cultures

These are some of the key points we find in the Constitution on the Liturgy from 1963.

Revised missal introduced by Pope Paul VI

If we move ahead six years to 1969, we see how these points were taken up in the revision of the Missal under the direction of Pope Paul VI.

In introducing the revised Missal, Pope Paul referred to the studies that had been made in the previous few centuries that had prepared the way for the revision.

“No one should think that this revision of the Roman Missal has been accomplished suddenly. The progress in liturgical studies in the last four centuries has certainly prepared the way. After the Council of Trent, the study “of ancient manuscripts in the Vatican library and elsewhere”, as Saint Pius V indicated in the apostolic constitution *Quo primum*, helped greatly in the correction of the Roman Missal. Since then, however, other ancient sources have been discovered and published, and liturgical formulas of the Eastern Church have been studied. Many wish that these doctrinal and spiritual riches not be hidden in libraries, but be brought to light to illumine and nourish the minds and spirit of Christians.”

Pope Paul then gives an outline of the plan of the revised Missal.

He notes that the Missal now begins with an introduction, called a “General Instruction”.

“A General Instruction or preface for the book gives the new regulations for the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice, the rites, the functions of each of the participants, furnishings, and sacred places.”

Pope Paul goes on to note the features that we are now familiar with: such as the penitential rite, the Scripture readings arranged in a cycle of three years for Sundays and in a cycle of two years for weekdays, the responsorial psalm, the homily, the prayer of the faithful.

One element of the celebration that Pope Paul dwells on particularly is the Eucharistic Prayer. He notes that this part of the celebration has been enriched by the addition of new prayers.

Active participation of the people

One of the major themes in the *Constitution on the Liturgy* was promoting the active participation of the people in celebrating the liturgy. At one point, the bishops noted various ways in which the people could participate:

“By way of promoting active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and songs, as well as by actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes. And at the proper times all should observe a reverent silence.” (par 30)

In the next paragraph of the *Constitution on the Liturgy*, the Council says that the rubrics should “make provision for the parts belonging to the people”. (par 31)

This might seem obvious to us now, but it was a very significant development. The editions of the Missal before the Council had not referred to the people's role in the liturgy. They had referred only to the roles of the priest and servers. Before the Council, the first rubric in the Ordo Missae began: "Sacerdos paratus cum ingreditur ad Altare" ("When the priest is ready and has come to the altar"). After the Council, the first rubric in the Ordo Missae began: "Populo congregato, sacerdos cum ministris ad altare accedit", "When the people have assembled, the priest with the ministers comes to the altar"). The rubric refers first of all to the people who form the congregation, the assembly. This is very much in tune with the Vatican Council's emphasis on the role of the people in the liturgy, "the full and active participation by all the people".

We see this emphasis, for example, in the Council's provisions regarding music and architecture. In regard to music, the vision of the Council included both choirs and the whole congregation.

"The treasure of sacred music is to be preserved and fostered with very great care. Choirs must be diligently promoted, especially in cathedral churches; but bishops and other pastors of souls must be at pains to ensure that, whenever the sacred action is to be celebrated with song, the whole body of the faithful may be able to contribute that active participation which is rightly theirs." (par 114)

Similarly in regard to architecture, the Council's vision was of churches that were arranged so as to encourage the active involvement of the congregation in the rites.

"When churches are to be built, let great care be taken that they be suitable for the celebration of liturgical services and for the active participation of the faithful." (par 124)

Unity in diversity

In the final section of his introduction to the revised missal, Pope Paul VI referred to variations and adaptations that may be made in the celebration according to local culture and conditions. He also referred to the great diversity of languages that would be used by the Church throughout the world. At the same time, he expressed his hope that the revised Missal would be a sign of unity in prayer. This is what he wrote:

"Even though, in virtue of the decree of the Second Vatican Council, we have accepted into the new Roman Missal lawful variations and adaptations, we hope that the faithful will receive the new Missal as a help toward witnessing and strengthening their unity with one another; that through the new Missal one and the same prayer in a great diversity of languages will ascend, more fragrant than any incense, to our heavenly Father, through our High Priest, Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit."

Balancing various values

In approving the revised Order of Mass and the revised rites of the other sacraments, Pope Paul was seeking to implement the vision of the Second Vatican Council. The overall aim was beautifully positive: to foster the prayer of the Christian people around the world, expressed in many languages but united with Christ and with one another through the one Spirit of God. Yet in Pope Paul's words we can sense that there are certain tensions in this area. Putting the Council's vision into practice involved a balancing of various values. For example, in what ways can the unity of the Church be expressed while also allowing appropriate diversity in languages and customs in various parts of the world? How can appropriate local initiatives be fostered while recognizing a role for central government?

These tensions were present in the debates during the Council and in the years immediately following the Council and they have continued in the years since. At different times, the balance between the various values has changed.

Policy changes regarding the translation of liturgical texts

We can see this, for example, in regard to the translation of liturgical texts over the past forty years. In the earlier years, there was a care for expressing unity in the Church throughout the world through having the key rituals and the basic meaning of prayers in common but there was emphasis on having translations that were adapted to the various ways of speaking in the different languages. In more recent years, there are still translations into various languages but there has been an emphasis on expressing the common prayer around the world by having translations that follow as closely as possible the Latin originals in vocabulary and grammar.

This change in approach is clearly evident when we compare two Vatican documents giving directives about translations.

In 1969, the Consilium for Implementation of the Constitution on the Liturgy issued an instruction on the translation of liturgical texts for celebrations with a congregation. In 2001, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments issued another instruction about the translation of liturgical books. The professed goal of the two documents was the same, namely, to give directions for a faithful translation of liturgical texts from Latin into modern languages. However, the documents proposed different approaches as to how this goal would be achieved.

In the 1969 document, the emphasis was on the modern languages into which the prayers were to be translated. In the 2001 document, the emphasis was on the Latin language from which the prayers were to be translated. This different emphasis is reflected in the forms in which the documents were issued. The 1969 document was issued in six modern languages and is generally referred to by the first words of the French edition, *Comme le prévoit*. By contrast, the 2001 document was issued in Latin and is referred to by the opening Latin words, *Liturgiam authenticam*.

We can see the change of emphasis from translating into the vernacular to translating from the Latin if we compare a couple of passages from the two documents.

In the 1969 document we read: “It is not sufficient that a liturgical translation merely reproduce the expressions and ideas of the original text. Rather it must faithfully communicate to a given people, and in their own language, that which the Church by means of this given text originally intended to communicate to another people in another time.” (*Comme le prévoit*, par 6)

In the 2001 document we read: “The original text, insofar as possible, must be translated integrally and in the most exact manner, without omissions or additions in terms of content, and without paraphrases or glosses. Any adaptation to the characteristics or the nature of the various vernacular languages is to be sober and discreet.” (*Liturgiam authenticam*, par 20)

There is also a change of emphasis regarding the sort of language to be used in the translation.

In the 1969 document we read: “The language chosen should be that in ‘common’ usage, that is suited to the greater number of the faithful who speak it in everyday use”. Quoting Pope Paul VI, the document says that the language should be suited even to ‘children and persons of little education’. At the same time, the language should not be common in a bad sense, but ‘worthy of expressing the highest realities’.

The 2001 document also refers to the message of Paul VI that the language of the translations should be both easily understandable and worthy of the noble realities being expressed. However, the 2001 document goes on to refer to the development of a “sacred style” which may include words that are obsolete in ordinary use.

Changes regarding the International Commission on English in the Liturgy

At the same time as there was this change in Vatican policy regarding the translation of liturgical texts, there was a change in the provisions about those who would prepare translations. Originally, the International Commission of English on the Liturgy was a group established in 1963 by bishops from countries where English would be used in the liturgy. The Commission was a group set up by the bishops and given the task of preparing translations for consideration by the bishops. In more recent years, the Roman Congregation for Divine Worship has directed that there be changes in the Commission’s constitution that would mean the Roman Congregation must approve the major officials of the Commission’s staff.

So there has been a change of policy about translating liturgical texts and also about who must approve those working on the translations. Put together, these changes mean a move away from the preparation of strongly vernacular focused translations by national bishops’ conferences through a commission that the bishops themselves choose and a move towards the preparation of Latin-focussed translations by a commission whose officials must be approved by the Roman congregation.

Vatican II on translating liturgical texts

It is an interesting question to what extent these different approaches are in line with the provisions of the Second Vatican Council. In paragraph 36 of the Council’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy we read: “Since the use of the mother tongue, whether in the Mass, the administration of the sacraments, or other parts of the liturgy, may frequently be of great advantage to the people, the limits of its employment may be extended.

“It is for the competent territorial ecclesiastical authority mentioned in Article 22.2 (which became the bishops conference) to decide whether, and to what extent, the vernacular language is to be used according to these norms; their decrees are to be approved, that is, confirmed, by the Apostolic See. Translations from the Latin text into the mother tongue which are intended for use in the liturgy must be approved by the competent territorial ecclesiastical authority mentioned above” (that is, the national bishops conference).

Over the past few decades we have seen different approaches to the translation of liturgical texts. I would suggest that in the translation of texts, as in other areas of liturgy, we do well to regularly check our approach against the vision of liturgy proposed by the Second Vatican Council.

Vatican II on liturgical adaptations according to the cultures of various peoples

A related question concerns other adaptations to the cultures of various peoples around the world, for example in ritual customs, in forms of music, in styles of architecture.

Following the Council's directives about the use of vernacular languages, there are paragraphs about adapting the liturgy to the genius and traditions of various peoples. This is what we find in paragraph 37. "Even in the liturgy, the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or the good of the whole community. Rather she respects and fosters the spiritual adornments and gifts of the various races and peoples. Anything in their way of life that is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy and, if possible, preserves intact. Sometimes in fact she admits such things into the liturgy itself, as long as they harmonise with its true and authentic spirit."

An example of liturgical adaptation in Samoa

I recall an example of adaptation that I came across during a visit to Samoa around thirty years ago.

It involved the use of a fine mat in an adapted form of the penitential rite at the beginning of Mass. The background to this rite was a custom traditional in Samoan culture following a death. When a person has died, people would come to that person's house to offer their sympathies to the family. But they wouldn't go straight into the house. Rather, they would stop outside. They would sit on the ground and place a fine mat, finely woven from long leaves, over their head. If the dead person's family considered that the visitor had offended the dead person or the family in some way, the family would leave the visitor sitting outside. If the offence was serious, they might be left there for hours. In that case, the fine mat would have the very practical value of shading the visitor from the hot sun. But there was also a sense that in covering their head with a fine mat they were expressing sorrow for any offence they had caused and that sitting outside was a form of penance.

Finally, when the family considered that the visitor had done enough penance, someone from the family would come out and take the mat from their head and bring the visitor into the house. That was a sign that the offence had been forgiven and that the visitor was now welcome to come in the family's home.

This ceremony had been adapted for use as a penitential rite at the start of Mass. At the start of the Mass the priest would come in procession to the sanctuary, but before going to the altar he would sit on the floor with his head covered with a fine mat. This seemed to me to be an expression of sorrow and repentance that would resonate strongly with Samoan people who had grown up with the ceremony of covering the head with a fine mat as a symbol of sorrow for any offence and a desire for true repentance.

After the priest had sat on the ground with the mat over his head for a short time, someone would come and take the mat from his head. Only then would the priest get up and go to the altar. The priest was seen as a representative of the community. So when the mat was lifted from his head, it was a symbol of God's forgiveness of the whole community. Then, in union with the priest, the whole community could spiritually stand up and move forward and be welcomed to God's house and share in the celebration with the great family of God's people.

This was an example of cultural adaptation in the liturgy. However, in my experience, this is a rather rare example. There do not seem to have been many such adaptations of the customs of various peoples around the world being included in the liturgy.

Adaptations in Australia

In earlier years, in many of our parish communities in Australia, the congregation was predominantly European in heritage. That may have meant that people felt at home with the largely European style of worship that was provided in the liturgies of the Roman Rite and this may have lessened any sense of need for notable adaptations. In more recent years, with larger numbers of immigrants coming from Asia and Africa, people might feel a greater need to include some elements of Asian or African culture in liturgical celebrations. And, of course, the descendants of the original inhabitants of this land have a heritage that is quite different from that of Europeans.

Over the years, various people have considered how elements from Australian Aboriginal cultures might be included in Christian liturgy. A number of Australian liturgical scholars have recently highlighted this as an area that could profit from further attention. In a collection published in Australia last year called *Vatican Council II: Reforming Liturgy* several writers suggested a systematic study of various elements from Aboriginal cultures, such as the use of water rituals or the use of colours or the use of fire. Some elements of Aboriginal rituals might then be recognised more clearly as being suitable for inclusion in Christian liturgy, either within largely Aboriginal communities or possibly more broadly. This could be a fulfilment in the liturgical area of the often quoted words of Pope John Paul II in Alice Springs in 1986 when he was speaking to Australia's indigenous peoples:

“The gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ speaks all languages. It esteems and embraces all cultures. All over the world people worship God and read his word in their own language, and colour the great signs and symbols of religion with touches of their own traditions. Why should you be different from them in this regard, why should you not be allowed the happiness of being with God and each other in Aboriginal fashion? Seek out the best things of your traditional ways. The Church herself in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others.” (Quoted in *Vatican Council II: Reforming Liturgy*, pp. 61-62)

Living Liturgy: the Vision of Vatican II

The title I chose for this lecture was “Living Liturgy: the Vision of Vatican II”. To conclude my reflections I would like to offer a summary of what I see as key elements of the Council's vision of liturgy.

The Council sought to promote what I have called living liturgy that would have the following qualities:

Living liturgy would draw on the **rich tradition of liturgical prayer** that has enlivened the Church through the centuries. At the same time, such liturgy would be open to the various **cultures around the world today** and would draw on the music and art and architecture and ritual of these cultures to further enrich the Church's prayer.

Living liturgy would use **language worthy of expressing the sacred realities** being celebrated. At the same time such liturgy would use words and symbols that are **readily appreciated by people today**.

Living liturgy would invite **each member of the community to participate** in word and gesture as well as in mind and heart.

Living liturgy would be a **central element in a full Christian life** that would include sharing the good news of Christ, working for justice and peace and showing charity to all, especially to those in great need.

Living liturgy would be the **high point** of the life of the Christian community. Living liturgy would be a **fount** from which the Christian community draws refreshment on the pilgrimage of life.

May the vision be fulfilled!

This is the vision. As far as complete fulfilment of the vision goes, it may be as we read in one of the verses of the prophet Ezekiel: “The vision is for many years ahead. The prophecy is for distant times.” (12:27)

I pray though that the vision might be more and more fulfilled even in our time. The more it is fulfilled, the more we can celebrate the living liturgy that the Vatican Council spoke of, the more we will be drawing on this wonderful source of the Christian spirit and the more we will be living as a true Christian community.