

Catechism on the Liturgy I,10

c. Although it is proper to think of these eight modes as stages of a gradual act, they should not be seen as stages in the sense of a rocket ship, where one burns out and falls away to oblivion, and another being lit and burning in its place. Rather, they are like the scales of music, where the musician sounds *do* here and *mi* there, and then ends on *fa*. So it is that a good teacher can go back and forth between the modes, forming and instituting and eruditing a student in a single class, or staying in one mode alone, depending on the need and capability of the student.

1. The first of these modes is *erudire* (ex + rudus), and the word means to make what is rude smooth, or polished. In other words, the task of the teacher in this mode is to bring the student out of rudeness – which is not necessarily ill will - but rather an inability to recognize the time and place of a thing. Erudition is then a kindly introduction, a pointing out of what and how things are done. Simply put, erudition inculcates good manners, and good manners are the right approach to things.

Of course, there are those who would deny that there are such things as good manners when speaking about the sacred. The idea of ignoring a proper way of doing something – which might mean some personal sacrifice - in favor of what is more expedient or comfortable, is a temptation to which many in the Church have succumbed, thinking

that it is not important to make gestures such as the Sign of the Cross in a certain way, with accuracy and devotion. Perhaps some of the problem comes from philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who is famous for having elevated the petulance of the recalcitrant child to the point of ordinance. “Let the child do nothing on anybody’s word. Nothing is good for him unless he feels it to be so.”

In this mode of Erudition, the smallest child can grasp the significance of the Holy Eucharist, by not only being taught on the proper way to fold one’s hands in order to receive Holy Communion devoutly, but by taking in, as it were, consciously or otherwise, the example of parents, parishioners, and the priest.

Let me tell an anecdote to illustrate this. I was speaking with a good and friendly bishop one evening, who had asked me how he could restore reverence for the Holy Eucharist in his diocese. I should have answered like St. Joseph of Cupertino, who, when asked the same question responded, “See to it that the priests in your diocese pray their breviaries and celebrate their Masses devoutly.” But instead I asked him to repeat the question (to his surprise) asking again simply because it was such a good and beautiful question, and I wanted to hear it once more, and was unaccustomed to

hearing bishops talk this way. While I did not have a simple answer (though I recall stating that above all it was something he had to want... and if he really wanted it, he would find a way to accomplish such a noble goal), I did want to bring up the aspect of erudition.

This mode of teaching is often neglected, especially if the priest who celebrates the Mass is negligent about paying attention to the details of reverence. In the Gregorian Rite then, one finds many detailed instructions to insure that the Eucharist is not treated as ordinary bread, but bread which is holy and set apart. This is evident from the necessity of keeping the canonical fingers together after the consecration, to the many genuflections, to the use of the corporal, to kneeling for communion, to the use of the paten, to mention just a few of these safeguards – all of which are teaching.

After we had talked somewhat about this mode of teaching, the bishop told me a story about his childhood parish. The pastor of the very large parish was a greatly respected and admired priest, who took great care to insure that the celebration of the Mass was dignified and orderly, according to the manifold specifications in the old rite. But while he was coming down from the altar, a mishap occurred, where many of the consecrated hosts had dropped on the marble floor. Women gasped, men blushed, and the pastor was exceedingly nervous and upset at the incident; his normal

composure absent from the rest of the Mass.

But what most struck the boy who would one day become a bishop, was that after Mass, he observed the great man (for the tall monsignor was a great man in the boy's eyes), getting on his hands and knees, and with a magnifying glass, holy water, and white linen carefully inspecting the entire area (guarded by an altar boy with a candle), and just as carefully (though unintentionally) purifying the whole area with tears in his eyes. The bishop then said something to this effect, "I think I learned more about what the Holy Eucharist was by that accident, than by any sermon I ever heard. Is that what you mean by Erudition?"

Well, in a word, yes. The boy saw with his own eyes the actions of a priest who paid attention to the details of reverence, so that whatever the Holy Eucharist was, it was *extremely* important not only to the pastor, but to everyone there who saw the mishap. It was, in a word, sacred. As St. Cyril of Jerusalem put it, "Have the utmost care that no part of the Eucharistic species be lost. For, tell me, if any one gave you grains of gold, would you not guard them with the greatest circumspection and be most solicitous that none of them be lost and that you thereby suffered no loss? How much more cautious you must be not to lose a crumb of that, which is incomparably more valuable than gold and precious stones"