

A transcription of Fr. Fryar's talk from the 20th of June 2022 • Keynote Address at the Symposium

When we celebrate Mass, we do not just use anything for the sacrifice. We have specific dedicated, consecrated and blessed accoutrements that are set aside just for this Holy Sacrifice.

They are usually beautiful, always valuable, and always set aside for the one task of being used at Mass. So for eg., the chalice should be made out of silver. So silver is a pure metal; it is not an alloy. So brass is an alloy, it is a mixture of copper and zinc. But silver is a pure metal and that is why when you buy something with Silver, it is going to have a little marking on there, '999' if its pure Silver, or Sterling Silver if its '.95' or whatever it is, ...but it should be a pure metal, it is not mixed with anything else.

It is plated in Gold, and again, gold is a pure metal, that's why when you buy something in gold, it's going to tell you if it's 24 carat or 12 carat or whatever, because it's a pure metal, it is not an alloy. So this is what is used for the chalice. It is not made entirely out of gold because gold will bend too fast, so that's why it is made out of silver so it's got a little bit of strength to it, but still pure metal.

The cruets should be either silver or crystal. Crystal is basically the same thing as glass, it's got a little bit of lead in it, but it's a more valuable substance than glass.

The linens used at the altar should be pure linen. It should not be cotton, should not be polyester. Linen is the strongest natural fibre in the world as opposed to cotton, or rayon, bamboo. It is a luxury cloth and it lasts a long time compared to other natural fibres, for eg. linen sheets, real linen sheets can last for generations and generations, because they last a really long time.

The linens for the altar should be pure white to reflect the purity of God. They shouldn't be coloured or off-white. They should be pure white to reflect that purity of God.

Candles should be beeswax. Now, poor parishes are allowed to use a 51% blend but the whole concept of the 51% is that the majority of it should be beeswax, and there's a reason for beeswax being so important with the candles that we use. They are made by bees.

Now bees are phenomenal creatures. Some people joke that they are extraterrestrial creatures. But a bee can for eg., detect a demonic presence. They will be able to notice that. Bees can fly away from their hives.; suppose you have 100 hives. The bee can fly 10 miles away, gather whatever it is they need to gather, travel 10 miles back and know exactly which one is their hive.

They are always working. And the majority of bees are actually virgins. Even the queen bee only has the procreation act once in her life. So she'll fly out of the hive and then one of the drones will find her and then she flies back in and that's it. Then she gives birth to thousands and thousands of bees.

But all the other bees are all mostly female; the males are kicked out of the hive because they are lazy and they don't work, (*laughter from the audience*) so they are actually abandoned to die, and the ladies, they all get to work in there and they're all virgins and they work really hard. They go on and gather the honey and they don't just eat the honey, they collect it for the hive and they make their wax or whatever they do.

They are extremely loyal, so if the queen leaves the hive, (actually I don't know if you've seen pictures of someone who is covered in bees, it's actually not too dangerous, what you do is that

you grab the queen, and you for example, you stick the queen under your hat, and all the other bees will just come and just like, cover you, and it's kinda fun trying to get rid of them) but still, they are extremely loyal to their queen. If a queen leaves the hive, the bees will go and follow their queen until the queen finds a new hive and then they all land there.

Believe it or not, they are actually peaceful creatures. They live in a large community and they don't fight each other, which is quite a phenomena. They only sting when they are defending their home, or when one of their fellow bees is being attacked, that's when they will sting you. But of their own, if you see a bee on a plant, or if you see a bee on the ground thirsty and you give it water or whatever, it's actually not going to really sting you, unless it thinks that it's being threatened. And if they don't have a hive either, if you see them all hanging off a tree, 'cause they're looking for a new home, they are not going to sting you either 'cause they are not protecting their home.

If it's a hot day, you go to the beehive, it's kind of cool, you'll see little bees at the front door of the hive and they are flapping their wings to cool down the hive, 'cause they've got this community spirit going on there.

So they are amazing little creatures, but being this way, they are very symbolic and used a lot in Christian art and are mentioned several times in the liturgy.

So candles should be made out of beeswax.

The vestments should be silk. Not rayon, not polyester. Silk is made from larvae of silkworms, which are the larvae of moths to make their cocoons. So there is kind of that innocence, symbolized there by the silk.

So just from the objects that we have mentioned so far, we can see certain characteristics of God that the items used in the divine worship try to reflect. So these are material objects but because of the symbolism of what they are made out of or related to, they reflect God in some way, which is a beautiful thing.

So for example, first of all, the beauty of God is reflected - these things are beautiful. The purity of God is reflected very strongly; everything that I've actually mentioned has a certain amount of purity to it. Everything there has that purity. And of course the virtue of Purity is the virtue that is going to bring us closest to God, who is a pure Spirit.

These things are valuable; they represent that pricelessness of God.

Strong; the linen is strong – God is omnipotent.

Durable, Timeless – Gold doesn't rust. Silver takes a long time to taint. These things, they are Timeless, which represents God's eternity.

As far as the bees go, we see intelligence, which reflects the omniscience of God. We see working; God is omnipresent and working in all places; always working. Bees are loyal, peaceful, powerful, merciful; and all these things have that aspect of sacredness, they are set apart, they are not used for anything else and in fact, it would be the sin of sacrilege to, for example, take the chalice from the altar and drink beer out of it. No, they are supposed to be set apart for the worship of God.

So all these things reflect the qualities of God, and that's just why we use them.

So there's this thing in the grace in the liturgy. There's two kinds of Grace that you can get from liturgy, from Mass and from our prayers. You get the graces 'ex opere operato' and 'ex opere operantis'

The graces 'ex opera operato' are from the thing itself. So, the Mass has all the graces from Calvary there, and when you go to Mass, you're participating in Calvary and so there is a huge amount of grace available at every Mass, no matter how it's offered, wherever it's offered, by the Mass itself. That's why some people will convert to the Catholic faith, just by assisting at Mass, by these graces 'ex opere operato' of the Mass itself.

Then you have the 'ex opere operantis' and that is everything else to do with the Mass. The more fitting it is for the Mass, the more graces we get out of attending that Mass. So for eg. if you celebrate Mass with a plastic cup, you are going to get the graces 'ex opera operato' of the Mass itself, but if you celebrate the Mass with a very valuable chalice, you are going to get so many more graces, just because of the chalice.

Now, if you put everything together, then you're going to get so much more graces. If you've got the beautiful chalice and the beautiful cruets and the beautiful vestments and the beautiful church and you've got a really good choir and you've got a really holy priest and if you have really holy altar servers and so on, if the congregation all went to confession right before the Mass and so they are all in a state of grace, there's going to be a lot of grace going on at that Mass because it is so much more fitting for the glory of God and that's what 'ex opere operantis' is.

One of the questions that might be in your heads right now is the stuff that I just mentioned about the linen and the silk and about the silver chalice and so on, is "Is all this still required?" In some churches, we see oil-filled candles used instead of candles or electric candles, vestments, sometimes look like table cloths or altar cloths look like they are disposable and so on.

"When did these rules change?" When I was in seminary, we did a course on the philosophy of History and in that course we learnt that Art is one of the first reflections of the culture of any given time. So if you want to see how the essence of a culture is, at any given decade, just look at the art and the art will tell you a lot about that culture.

And so it is not a question of which came first, the chicken or the egg, it's not a question of 'the art is really bad, therefore the culture must be really bad'. The art being bad, doesn't make the world bad. It's more a reflection of the greater problems that are there, that are causing the problems in society that are usually moral problems that are causing the corruption in society and then later on, that is what is reflected in this art.

So, you see this sloppiness now in the accoutrements, these little things that we are talking about, but then at the same time if you look a little deeper, you are seeing a kind of sloppiness in the celebration of the Mass. You see sloppy attendance at Mass, you see a loss of faith of those who are attending a Mass, you see a loss of faith in the Eucharist because of the sloppy reception of the Eucharist and in fact you see a lack of belief in God in the world in general. It's all deteriorating because it's coming from these moral problems that are there.

But if we get back to Architecture; there is an aspect of Architecture in modern churches that I want to point out, and that is, the removal of the choir loft, and placing the choir in front of the church, up by the altar.

Now I can see there is a good intention there because what the choir does is very closely related to what's happening at the altar, so why not put the two together up front. That's a good

intention, but the purpose of the choir loft is, you cannot see the choir, and it's high up and it's coming from behind, so coming from behind, the choir is still very closely united to what's going on in the sanctuary. If you put the one in front and the one behind, you are kind of involving the entire church in the liturgy that is taking place; you are kind of surrounding the people in the pews with everything going on in the Liturgy both on the altar and in the choir loft.

If you put them both in the front, it's more, kind of like a performance in a way.

The other purpose of the choir loft being at the back and up high is that it represents the singing of the angels. So the angels sing on high, and we cannot see the angels; we hear about them in Bethlehem singing 'Glory to God in the Highest' up there in the clouds to the shepherds. We know that the angels are at Mass, we know that they are worshipping, and so the whole concept of having the choir in the back, up high with the beautiful voices singing, is a representation of the angels. That the angels are singing during Mass.

Now if you move the choir loft to the front of the church, now you've got a slight problem because now you are kind of performing. Now you are being watched; now you have to kind of perform a little bit better and unfortunately, it feeds our pride. And that pride puts Man first and God second.

When you are in the choir loft, you are singing just for God. The people hear your voice, but they are not saying 'Oh that's you'. They are just hearing the beautiful melodies. When you're at the front, they immediately attribute it to you. And the temptation is always there, to take that glory, for yourself.

We are all naturally inclined to pride, because we all have to fight that first instinct that we have, of self-preservation. And that first instinct of self-preservation makes us put ourselves first.

Now, artists and musicians make beautiful things. And you're good at it. You're good at making beautiful things, so it is naturally more difficult for you to admit your capabilities without a false pride, but at the same time not going to the other extreme to falling into real pride. So the false pride is the one saying 'Oh no, I didn't just write this beautiful piece of music; that wasn't me, that was just the pen in my hand.' That's a false pride. Yes, you did write that music and you should admit the fact that 'yes, I wrote that music'. But you should be able to admit that, you wrote that music, without letting it puff you up at all. So that if someone asks you "Did you write the Offertory song?" And you say 'yes' and they begin to insult you about it, you get the exact same reaction as if they started praising you about it. That's kind of where humility is. That's perfect humility right there.

So it's difficult to fight pride as it is. But why put you up the front of the church to make fighting pride even harder? It's better to have the choir in the choir loft, so that you can represent the angels.

Now it's nice to have a symbolic thing, about representing the angels. But in reality, what you need to do is you need to actually represent the angels in your own lives. To make that real. Very much like the gold that is in the chalice is not representing a pure metal; it IS a pure metal. Or the silver, IS a pure metal. Or the linen, IS a pure natural strong substance, and so on. You have to not just be an image of the angels in the choir loft, but you have to represent the angels in your own lives. And why do you have to do that? Well, precisely because of this grace 'ex opere operantis'.

If you are able to produce the music that you sing, from your heart, from a pure heart, from a heart that is actually kind of angelic, you're actually going to be contributing to the liturgy, not

just with beautiful melodies, but increasing the grace of the Mass, by living the part of representing the angels.

If on the other hand, you are living a corrupt impure life, you're actually robbing the whole congregation of graces. Because you are corrupting, in a way, the liturgy.

Earlier today, (we have a altar server training going on at St. Vitus) I spoke to the kids there; and I kind of told them the same thing : I told them, if you guys knew that the priest was in mortal sin when he was coming in to celebrate Mass, you'd probably just get up and leave; why would you sit around for this? Why would you sit through a mass when you know that the priest is living in mortal sin? And I told them that if they are in mortal sin, they should step aside. They shouldn't serve the Mass because they are making it worse for everybody else. Everybody else in the congregation is getting less Grace out of this Mass because they're serving at the altar in mortal sin.

So it's kind of the same thing that I should be saying to you, that if you're not living a pure life, if you're not living a good life within yourself, you need to fix that. You need to be good with God when you're going to sing in the choir.

Now that doesn't mean that you should all run to the Sacristy door five minutes before Mass and bash on the door and say 'Father can you hear my confession so that I can go sing in the choir'. That is not what it is. You all prepare your music every week. And especially as conductors, you spend hours and hours, days, preparing the notation that's going to be sung and figuring out what parts should be sung depending on who you've got for the choir and so on. There's a lot of preparation that goes into making good music for the Mass.

You need to also do that preparation, a spiritual preparation for the Mass. A remote preparation for the mass. So that means that if you know that you're going to be singing on Sunday, and you've unfortunately fallen into sin, then you should go to confession on Saturday, on Friday or on someday during the week and you should live the rest of that week after confession, knowing, 'I'm going to sing for the Good Lord on Sunday', I should live accordingly, so that when I get into the choir loft and when I do unite my voice to the Liturgy, I'm actually helping the graces of the Mass and not drawing from them.

So the good choir member, might be able to read music, match pitch and have a nice voice, but more than that, the choir member should represent the angels. The good choir member should reflect some, or all of the qualities of those accoutrements of the altar that we mentioned earlier on.

So, the good choir member should be able to reflect that beauty, especially the beauty of the music that you are singing. Should, and it's very important, reflect that purity. Everything that is used on the altar has a certain level of Purity about it. The most pure of its class of each state that is used on the altar. The most pure metals, the most pure cloth, the most pure glass and so on.

These things that are used, are valuable. So also the quality of what is sung in the choir should be valuable. It should be sung with quality.

The linen is strong. You should be strong, and not so much strong physically but strong in your faith. You should have a strong faith if you are going to be singing in the choir.

These items are durable. They are timeless. You should be timeless, not so much in your age. But timeless in preserving your faith. You should be faithful to God and timeless in that way.

The bees are always working. You too also should be working, you should be putting in that effort in the choir. The bees are peaceful but powerful creatures. You see a lot of Charity in them, (they are flapping their wings at the door of the hive) that you should have as well.

You should have Harmony among you. A choir that is united is going to sing and sound far better than a choir that's fighting each other. That's just how it is.

There should be a Charity among you. So if one of the choir members is having a problem at home, an emergency or whatever, they should be able to pick up the phone and then call another choir member, and you should be there to help them, even though it's got nothing to do with music, even though it's got nothing to do with the church, but there should be that Charity among you.

And there's that sacredness of all these things; all these things used in the Liturgy are all set apart. They're not used for anything else.

So also the choir member should be distinguishable. They should be able to, just by looking at you, recognize "Oh, you sing in the choir, you must sing in the choir, right?" You comport yourself a certain way.

Sometimes you see priests on the street, and they are not wearing their cassock and immediately you know right away, "this must be a priest because he doesn't know how to dress properly". *(laughter in the audience)* But he's carrying himself as well, in a certain way. And also, the choir members should be able to carry themselves in a certain way, that you can tell right away, "Oh, you must be part of the church. You must be someone involved in the liturgy and I don't see you on the altar, so you must be there in the choir loft. You must be singing."

Now, if all this is true for the choir members in general, the choir director needs to set the example. Like the priest that leads by his example, or like the parents that set the example for their children, how can we expect the choir to be an image of the angels, if the Choir Master is proud and immoral and a sinner?

They need to see in you, for example, a purity of life, that emanates, that inspires. They need to see Patience in you. They need to see Love. They need to see Joy...Devotion. You need to set the example.

Anyway, that's all I've got to say today. I hope you have a really good week and I hope you return to your parishes energized, having learnt something. But if nothing else, try to be holy, so you can put a little more 'Sacred', into the 'Sacred Music' that you see.
Thank you. God bless you.