



**LETTER OF CARDINAL ANGELO SODANO
TO THE 52nd NATIONAL LITURGICAL WEEK**

Dear Bishop Brandolini,

At the end of August, the 52nd National Liturgical Week will be held in the beautiful setting of Riva del Garda, on the theme: *Laity in the liturgy: what is their ministry (ministeriality)?* The Holy Father wishes to say how pleased he is with this important pastoral initiative of the Liturgical Action Centre which, each year, offers an opportunity to reflect on the guidance and liturgical formation of the entire People of God, called in the diversity of their services and ministries to give praise to God.

This year, the theme of the week offers a chance to reflect again on the journey of the "ministeriality of the Church", based on the *Motu Proprio* of Paul VI, *Ministeria quaedam* of 15 August 1972, which marked a historical change in the forms of the ministries and services in the Church.

The vision of the Church as mystery of communion and a greater consideration of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit have contributed to shed light on the role of the laity in the ecclesial community. Thanks to the post-conciliar renewal, in recent decades lay people have acquired a greater awareness of their vocation, which is expressed in a plurality of tasks and services for building up the entire Christian people.

In the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, the Second Vatican Council teaches that it is the mission of the Pastors "to be shepherds of the faithful and also [to] recognize the service and charisms of the laity [so] that everyone, according to his gifts, will cooperate harmoniously in the common work" (n. 30).

In recent years, thanks to greater ecclesial sensitivity, theological and pastoral interest has focused on the "ministerial function" ("ministeriality"), above all, referring to "lay ministers", with greater attention to the role of the laity in local communities. The Italian Bishops, building on the doctrine of the *Motu proprio*, wrote two special pastoral documents, *Ministries in the Church* of 15 September 1973, and *Evangelization and Ministries* of 15 August 1977. They have provided opportune clarifications on designated ecclesial services providing that they are genuine expressions of ecclesial *diakonia*.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* of 30 December 1988 and the Interdicasterial Instruction *Ecclesiae de mysterio* of 15 August 1997 on "Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests", have examined the subject of lay ministries, stressing their significance for the vitality of the Church. At the same time the texts have set forth the importance of safeguarding and protecting the identity of priests, ordained for the sacred ministry, and that of the lay faithful, who are called above all to be evangelical witnesses in the world and to order temporal realities according to God.

Your conference, which gathers bishops, priests, deacons, men and women religious and numerous lay faithful who are involved in exercising a diversified "ministeriality" is guided

by such teaching.

The Holy Father hopes that this competent assembly may help to define better such terms as "ministry", "service" and "*diakonia*", and may direct ecclesial public opinion to fundamental subjects such as, the Christological value of ecclesial ministries; the Eucharist as a manifestation of the full "ministeriality" of the Church; local ministers involved in evangelization, the apostolate, the liturgical assembly and in charity.

In treating these themes, it is necessary to keep in mind the particular nature of the sacred liturgy. As the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* of the Second Vatican Council explained, "every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the Priest and of his Body, which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others. No other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree" (n. 7). According to the famous statement, used for the first time by the Magisterium in the "Motu proprio" *Tra le sollecitudini* (22 November 1903) of Pope St Pius X, the Constitution on the Liturgy desires: "that all the faithful be guided to that full, conscious and active participation in the liturgical celebrations, which is required by the very nature of the liturgy" (n. 14). Today this *participatio actuosa* (active participation) of the faithful is sometimes reduced to their performing some liturgical ministry. However, the Council wished to invite all believers to take part, consciously and actively, in the liturgical prayer itself, by offering to God the sacrifice of praise and adoring him "in spirit and in truth" (Jn 4,23).

As can be verified, in the Christian communities along with the structured ministries - for example, missionaries, catechists, and cooperators in the pastoral care of the sick - the so-called "*de facto* ministries" are also expanding in Italy, and, in particular, the extraordinary ministry of the Eucharist, which should be exercised according to the norms of canon law. When a community, in emergency situations, is left without a priest for the Eucharistic celebration on the Lord's Day, it can be recommended that the assembly gather around the Word of God under the guidance of an authorized lay minister. Yet, as is stated by the Church's teaching and reaffirmed by the Holy Father in his Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini*, "the objective must always remain the celebration of the Sacrifice of the Mass, the one way in which the Passover of the Lord becomes truly present, the only full realization of the Eucharistic assembly over which the priest presides *in persona Christi*, breaking the bread of the Word and the Eucharist" (n. 53).

In *Christifideles laici*, the Holy Father adds that it is necessary to be careful not to create confusion "between the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood", by interpreting arbitrarily the concept of "replacement", "clericalizing" it, and in that way risking the "creation, in fact, of an ecclesial structure of service parallel to that founded on the sacrament of Orders" (n. 23).

"I am among you as one who serves" (Lk 22,27), says the Lord: this is the model that must inspire every ministry in the Church. From this Gospel lesson the Church's "ministeriality" is continuously renewed, so that each person can live in authenticity of faith and service the role which, by virtue of Christian initiation and the gifts of the Spirit, he is called to fulfil.

The Holy Father wishes that the 52nd National Liturgical Week may contribute to the investigation of the theological, liturgical, canonical and pastoral questions that are connected with the ministries entrusted to the laity, and that the liturgical celebrations themselves scheduled for the conference may help towards a better grasp of the service of the laity in the liturgical assembly. For this I assure you of His prayerful support, and asking the maternal protection of the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, he gladly imparts a special Apostolic Blessing to you, to the Archbishop of Trent, to the bishops and priests present, to the presenters and to all those who participate.

With prayerful good wishes for the success of this important pastoral initiative, and with personal regards, I am devotedly in the Lord,

ANGELO Cardinal SODANO
Secretary of State

From the Vatican, 2 August 2001

