

EXTRACTS

THE NEW RITES FOR HOLY WEEK

WORSHIP, the American Liturgical Review published by the Benedictines of Collegetville, publishes in its January number an informed and authoritative article on the new Holy Week Liturgy by Fr Josef Löw, C.S.S.R., Vice-Relator of the Sacred Congregation of Rites. Fr Löw with his inside knowledge of issuing of these revolutionary changes from Rome comments on the three official documents that have promulgated the new legislation. His main theme is the 'pastoral opportunity' these changes offer and the need to prepare the laity in order that they should make the most of this opportunity. If the people are to derive the immense benefit for their Christian lives intended by the Holy See they must be instructed in the meaning of these changes. For this reason we should begin at once to prepare for this coming Easter.

The decree (of the Congregation of Rites) calls attention to a two-fold movement which was significant from the pastoral standpoint, and which in final analysis occasioned the present new legislation. In the first place, since the early middle ages there occurred a gradual displacement of the liturgical celebration of the sacred triduum from the night (or evening or afternoon) hours to the respective forenoon or morning. . . . In those centuries, however, the three days before Easter were holidays, when people rested from work; they could, accordingly, and were obliged to take part in the church services.

But later these days ceased to be holidays of obligation, with the result that very few people could take part in these morning services.

The regular weekday routine of these days emptied churches nearly everywhere in the morning; and soon there arose substitute popular devotions for the afternoons and evenings.

The Pastoral-liturgical Instruction which followed the Decree emphasises this point—the return to the liturgy as the centre of popular devotion.

The Ordinary of the place as well as all parish clergy are enjoined to see to it that all such folk customs and devotions which contribute to true piety be preserved and be prudently brought into harmony with the liturgy itself. But then the Instruction adds very clearly: 'The faithful should be instructed concerning the excellence of the liturgy which always, but most especially in these days (of Holy Week), by its very nature far surpasses all other and even the best of pious devotions and customs.' . . .

All such pious customs (as visits to the 'Sepulchre', the 'Three Hour Service' etc.) and popular devotions are not abolished. On the contrary, they are certain to be included under that category of which it is expressly stated that such practices are 'prudently' to be linked with the liturgy, which latter, however, must always be accorded first place. . . .

The liturgy itself is more sober, even stern, and symbolical, and though, especially during these days of Holy Week, it is often eloquently dramatic, it likewise always retains a certain dignified restraint. The ordinary people, however, want something more. . . .

They want to experience their religious devotions as much as possible. . . . It would be unjust and pastorally erroneous simply to deprive them of the devotions so dear to them in order to substitute the 'pure' liturgy.

It is comforting to notice from all this that there is nothing liturgically fanatical behind these changes. As Father Löw says, 'the purpose of this liturgical restoration is *entirely pastoral*, inspired by concern for souls: it is not some kind of liturgical archeology; nor is it meant to be a restoration of a museum piece'. The Holy See has a powerful sense of the needs of the faithful and one of the needs has become increasingly apparent in the demand for a liturgy that is really part of the spiritual life of the members of the Mystical Body. Here we find a magnificent expression given to this desire. It is now up to us to prepare fittingly for the great Paschal Feast in the manner indicated by these Roman directives.