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Lecture: What is Missing in Contemporary Sacramental Ministry? Pope Francis' Option*

First a few words to justify the title. By the term “sacramental ministry” I mean the whole life of the Church as a community of faith gathered around Jesus Christ, whose presence determines the administration of the sacraments. In the Church, they have their own names, but, in a broad sense man as the temple of God and his child is also the sacrament; the sacrament, or sign of life and sign of love. However, I intend to take a specific perspective on analysis, namely follow Pope Francis' attitude. Just as John Paul II introduced into pastoral practice the concept of the “new evangelization” to shake up the ossified structures of mission, so the call of the present Pope to go out towards man and the absolute respect for him is, in my opinion, another call of the Church to undertake the work of evangelization in a new way.¹ In the Francis' option the Church is poor, for the poor, and with the poor (see: EG 198). However, it is not in the sense of a charitable organization but in taking up a life lived in poverty of spirit – as St Brother Albert, for example, expressed by living among the poor instead of “helping” them.

Therefore, the presentation is an attempt to make a kind of “ruckus” about how we used to consider pastoral care, bearing in mind that no general answer to the question asked in the title exists – for there is only the reality of specific parishes in which Christians form the Church. Pastoral ministry (which also involves the way we usually think about it) consists in “giving Christ” to people

* The paper was delivered during the XLIX Wrocław Pastoral Days “Wielka Tajemnica Wiary. Eucharystia – Źródło Bożego Życia” (Great Mystery of Faith. Eucharist – Fountain of God's Life) held on 26–27 of August 2019.

¹ Cf. J. Szpet, *Inspiracje katechetyczne Ewangelii gaudium. Wybrane aspekty*, “Katecheza” 11 (2013), pp. 49–63.

through the sacraments that are simply signs behind which the supernatural reality is hidden. The Church is also called a sacrament (the presacrament). The whole theology is an operationalization of the fundamental truth that Jesus Christ is the sacrament (presence) of God. It is therefore crucial for the sacramental ministry to strive for Jesus Christ to be with us and to lead us to the Father in heaven. The problem that requires “ruckus” in this context is *sacramentalism*, which boils down to “distributing” graces and – as Fr. Blachnicki called it – making the parish a “service institution.” This sacramentalism of pastoral ministry manifests itself primarily in the “technical” approach to the sacraments (since we are dealing with the real effectiveness of the sacraments and the disposition of the receiving subject is difficult to say). However, such “observing the norms externally only would be contrary (...) to the essence of the sacred liturgy in which Christ the Lord wishes to gather his Church” (*Redemptionis Sacramentum* 5). It is not only a problem of our time but today the ease of access to other paths of “salvation” – which seem not only attractive but above all “credible” – leads to a departure without regret from the Church (its proposal of a sacramental approach to God). In many situations, as pastors report, participation in the sacraments is linked to well-established custom or family pressure (“we cannot get married now because I would like to have a nice wedding party;” “the child must have a godfather”).

Thus, what is missing in today’s sacramental ministry? My answer is this: we lack the path of sacramental initiation (in a strict sense, it is the catechumenal model of the service of the Church and the catechumenal form of catechesis). To explain this answer, I will try to make a brief reflection on three concepts: Church – catechesis – relationship. So, I want to answer the questions in short: What Church? What catechesis? And what relation?

What Church?

I will start with a quote:

He to them: brothers and sisters! They to him: Your Excellency! Would he be pleasantly surprised to hear: Brother Bishop? Therefore, a strange brotherhood, only one-sided? The easy answer is: in both directions, but the title is to express respect for the office held among brothers and sisters. Depending on its rank, the expressions are graded – from numerous reverends and most reverends to a few dozen eminences and one His Holiness. These dignities are also recalled by the separate costumes and insignia worn daily or at the altar. Is not a lawyer also

known as an attorney, a doctor – a physician, and a pharmacist – a master? Does not a judge or professor wear a gown and chain to mark the official or solemn character of their speech? (...) [And yet] the Church was not born in purple but social lowlands. The Apostles set out into the world from the Cenacle without pastorals, mitres, golden chains and rings. (...) Titles and ornaments spread when in the 4th century the Church gained the status of a state religion in the Empire, hence becoming a powerful and privileged institution. (...) The previously modest liturgy reached for the ceremony of the imperial court, modelling the costume of the celebrant on gala robes of the highest state dignitaries. Candles, incense, canopies, candles taken from secular and sacred pagan rhythms, as well as the richness of colours, ornaments, gold and silver of church vessels, were to overshadow the rites of the old religion. (...) The Church grew into feudalism. (...) In 428, Pope Celestine I, chastised the Bishop of Arles that his clergy, wanting to look different from the laymen, was wearing tunics and belts. *We should distinguish not by our clothes, but by our knowledge* he wrote. (...) If tradition is to remain authentic, and thus avoid being overloaded with the ever-increasing baggage of temporary adaptations, absolutizing relativity and falling into traditionalism, it must continuously orient itself on two lines of reference: The Gospels and the present day. The place where these lines intersect creates a meaningful sign appreciated by the post-conciliar Church: the sign of the times.²

Therefore, the poor Church that Pope Francis wants – believing that God is calling again: “Rebuild my Church!” – should, on the one hand, be as *simple* as the Gospel says about it, and on the other hand, *close to* the people among whom it is built. Simple and close, that is, understandable, legible, transparent, credible. It will not definitely be so unless it understands the meaning of the present time: “Now we do not need *ordinary administration*” (EG 25) – we must move “from the pastoral care of maintaining the status quo to the missionary one” (EG 15) – writes Francis. Karl Rahner already diagnosed:

Such pastoral ministry that knows only one recipe, that wants to open all doors with one key that holds in its hands the fixed point of Archimedes based on which it can easily move the world stumbles on the most straightforward ontological reflection, namely, that it is not possible, despite the unity of human being, and in the interest of man, to cancel its multiplicity.³

² J. Kracik, *Wielebni, przewielebni, najprzewielebniejsi*, “Tygodnik Powszechny” 18 (2014), pp. 35–37. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are by the WTR.

³ K. Rahner, *O możliwości wiary dzisiaj*, Krakow 1983, p. 163.

Such a poor Church – poor in its form, also visually, and in its ability to communicate the faith – is present in many places worldwide. The point is for the world to see that this is its general model!

Specifically, what model is it? Before we define it, let us remember what the Church is and why. The dynamics of the Holy Spirit, in whose era the Church lives, indicate a continuous gathering (convening) of a community that wants to live together with the presence of God (not the majestic God, but God *with us*). That is the etymology of the word Church in Hebrew (*kahal*) and Greek (*ekklesia*);⁴ that is the etymology of the word *liturgy*.⁵ The Church gathers together to experience the presence of the Risen Jesus: in the liturgy, it is manifold and requires the presence of sisters and brothers.⁶ If in the Cenacle Jesus – before he called bread and wine his Body and Blood – washed his disciples' feet, he intended (once again) to prepare them for the shock of God's emptying (see: Phil 2:7). Nevertheless, according to Francis' conviction, leaving the Cenacle is key: *ite missa est* ("go, you are sent"). The Church is not called to stay together for longer but, filled with the life of God, resume its journey. In this sense, neither can the sacramental ministry stop nor want to manage man's life, but take the form of accompaniment along the way.⁷

The Church, therefore, in addition to being a place (experience) of encounter, is also a place (experience) of support (...) so that a person can trust someone who has experienced a personal transformation in his life and has changed his thinking as a result of an Event that has shown him a broader perspective on life.⁸

We will return to this thread in a moment. Francis writes in his last exhortation:

⁴ To emphasize the dynamics of community, it is necessary to understand this word in a verb, not a noun sense. See: W. Kasper, *Kościół katolicki. Istota, rzeczywistość, posłannictwo*, Krakow 2014, pp. 199–202.

⁵ See: K. Filipowicz, *Poszukiwania misteryjnego charakteru liturgii*, "Studia Theologica Varsaviensia" 2 (2014), pp. 189–205.

⁶ See: Benedykt XVI, *Z wielką miłością do Chrystusa i Kościoła. Na zakończenie spotkania z duchowieństwem diecezji rzymskiej*, "L'Osservatore Romano" 7–8 (2005), p. 15.

⁷ See: G. Strzelczyk, *Wolność, wiara, Bóg. Rozmowy o chrześcijaństwie*, Krakow 2018, pp. 256–257; A. Przybecki, *Kościół musi wyruszyć w drogę. Polskie duszpasterstwo w poszukiwaniu duchowych korzeni*, "Teologia Praktyczna" 13 (2012), pp. 33–41.

⁸ D. Kurzydło, *Pedagogia przyjaźni. Katechumenalny model przygotowania do przyjęcia sakramentu bierzmowania jako wyraz odpowiedzialności, wierności i posłuszeństwa w Kościele*, the article in print.

Jesus had unconditional trust in the Father, he cared for his friendship with his disciples, and even in moments of crisis he remained faithful to it. He showed deep sympathy for the weakest, especially the poor, the sick, sinners and the excluded. He had the courage to face the religious and political authorities of his time; he experienced a sense of incomprehension and rejection; he experienced fear in the face of suffering and knew the weakness of the Passion; he looked to the future, entrusting himself to reliable hands of the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit.⁹

Exactly: He had the courage that we are only just gaining on the way – and this is the road to Emmaus.¹⁰ The Church is being formed on the way. In the Exhortation of *Lumen Fidei*, Francis shows the Church to which people want to belong – which they actually desire.

What catechesis?

The pastoral work (not the Church) is definitely in crisis today. One can put forward a hypothesis that it is primarily a crisis of catechesis,¹¹ but partly because it was “expelled” from the parish, which immediately affected also the sacramental life. For it is catechesis, and not the level of “services offered” in the parish, that has a direct impact on the perception and understanding of faith: the personal faith and the Church’s witness. The task of catechesis is to build up the community of faith – with an adult Christian being its most crucial addressee. If we talk about adult catechesis, we ask about ways in which people who, according to the International Commission for Catechesis, are formed, i.e. have problems and experiences that require extensive discernment. Secondly, they are lay people – i.e. they devote most of their time and energy to work and family. Thirdly, they are educated – i.e. they are not looking for systematic formation, but rather the possibility of solving and talking about immediate problems (see: CCC 26–30); fourthly, they can take responsibility

⁹ *Dokument końcowy XV Zwyczajnego Zgromadzenia Ogólnego Synodu Biskupów*, 63, [in:] *Christus Vivit* 31.

¹⁰ See: A. Draguła, *Emmaus. Tajemnice dnia ósmego*, Warsaw 2015, pp. 61–64.

¹¹ I do not mean school teaching of religion – although this assessment is also negative, it is impossible to underestimate the work of thousands of teachers who, in conditions inadequate to the times in which young people live, must find themselves in the daily reality of teaching. Catechesis is the work of the parish community and its important function is the process of Christian initiation at every stage of the journey of faith.

for their own development and supporting others if they are given a real opportunity to become involved in community life. It is evident that the adult formation takes place effectively in communities and ecclesial movements as long as they are catechetical (i.e., they fulfil at least some of the tasks of catechesis, see: DOC 85–86). Given the above-mentioned characteristics of the recipients and the need to accompany them on their way, it seems necessary to organize the so-called thematic groups that allow adult Christians to support each other when facing an experience that unites all participants, such as the death of a parent or child, betrayal of a spouse, or addiction.¹² That is why the Church needs a mature catechesis of adults so that they can take responsibility for conducting sacramental ministry in a parish to the extent that it does not manifest signs of sacramentalism or legalism.

It seems that good catechesis – i.e. one that is adapted to the spiritual needs of the recipient (in the broad sense) and that initiates into the life of Christ who transforms the human heart – constitutes a true antidote to the crisis of pastoral ministry. Symptoms of the above can easily be seen in Christians' complaints, whether justified or not, about its functioning (in a sense I expressed at the beginning), or in the helplessness associated with incompetence or unwillingness to be in the Church. Today sacramental ministry is a special kind of missionary pastoral care that goes with Christ from Jerusalem to Galilee, into everyday life – in human doubts, on a dark night, in the feeling of rejection by the Church's teaching.¹³

Three years ago, together with my students, we asked people who were leaving the Church after the Eucharist what they thought was the most significant spiritual problem/worry for adult Christians today.¹⁴ I want to quote here some of them, which in my opinion are an excellent illustration of the cry of adult Christians for catechesis in its various forms – if it is still not too late (see: ChV 202).

¹² See: D. Kurzydło, *Formacja dorosłych w dojrzałej wspólnocie chrześcijańskiej. Współczesna perspektywa*, [in:] *Problemy dorosłych ludzi. Formacja chrześcijańska dorosłych a codzienne trudności życia*, D. Kurzydło (ed.), Warsaw 2014, p. 18.

¹³ See: P.P. Ogórek, *Mistyka codzienności*, [in:] *Duchowość współczesnego Kościoła*, S. Urbański (ed.), Warsaw 2002, pp. 19–21.

¹⁴ See: D. Kurzydło, *Formacja do nadziei. Próba diagnozy problemów i potrzeb duchowych dorosłych chrześcijan*, "Studia Katechetyczne" 14 (2018), pp. 67–110. The research was carried out on a sample of over 15 thousand adult Christians living in different places in Poland, as well as in Belarus and England.

I used to hope to hear in the Church a reflection – an in-depth reflection – on reality, as it is. I needed this reflection, support, and I looked for it everywhere. Unfortunately, the Church takes care of itself, its fear that it will have no money, that people will manage without it. I met infantile, emotionally immature clergymen. Was I supposed to go to them with my doubts? I was scared. Today I am on the outside. I keep a tradition, but I have nowhere to deepen my faith. Maybe someday, when people see through their eyes and leave, the Church will understand that it must first take care of educating masters, guides in the faith. I have less and less of this hope (a 41-year-old woman).

I think that the problem is the lack of baptismal awareness, that is, we do not know who we really are and what happened to us at baptism. We do not have any religious experience of the Holy Spirit. Then, Jesus' teaching is a few phrases. In the past, the expression of religious experiences was beautiful art; today you can mainly see kitsch. It is a pity, because beautiful music could rebuild my tired heart. Meanwhile, in my church, devotees wail, while singing about their (or someone else's) grief, which makes me even more tired (a 29-year-old woman).

It seems to me that we cannot give in to God's love. We can't be amazed at how it affects us. God is a distant and strange person. I don't know what would bring us closer together. I feel like time is running out, and nothing is changing. I have the impression that the Church speaks to us in some foreign language that doesn't reach me at all (a 31-year-old woman).

It seems to me that the biggest problem for adults is that we don't know how to live the faith every day. We try to follow the Church's instructions, but life has its priorities. What the Church says – how can this be applied to life? For example, how can I go to the retreats if I have no one to leave my children with? I understand that I could learn something, something deeper. But when? (a 33-year-old woman).

I will say briefly: The joy of faith, prayer, and God has "dried up" for me. Today the world has answers to everything, so religion seems superfluous. It would be necessary if it showed the mystery of life, its depth, etc. I don't see it, I don't see the difference between science and religion. I have the impression that the priest in his sermons wants to prove the faith and orders to believe in God, as one believes in Pythagoras' statement: you must act like that otherwise it will be bad for you. Only that people around me live without God, even immorally, but they are doing well, they are healthy and happy. When I tried to talk to

the priest seriously about my faith, he had no time. And I think he was afraid of my questions. I'm in the Church, but I don't feel connected to anyone here (a 38-year-old man).

I believe that the vast majority of the problems and discussions currently underway are due to ignorance and lack of experience of the living God. All these speculations about doctrine or the constant emphasis that we must defend the teaching of the Church overlook the fact that Jesus had no initial requirements and that He saw no problems where we see them always. We demand that people be perfect without seeing their dramas. We give ready-made solutions without giving them any challenges. Jesus showed the way, today's preachers have only "good advice" (a 46-year-old man).

What would have to change to make me a better Christian? I think it would help a lot if someone treated me like an adult. But that is not so. I don't think anyone noticed that I've grown up. There's so much talk about freedom, and at the same time, it's carefully specified what to do, what not to do. And where am I? Where is my faith? I have many doubts about the teaching of the Church, but I have no one to talk to about it. As I asked a difficult question among my Catholic friends, I was considered a heretic (a 44-year-old man).

I am struck by the poor treatment of the liturgy, which then translates into poor quality of contact with another person. The beauty of the liturgy requires listening and the answer of the heart, not a rigid and carefully filled celebration. If a bishop, not Jesus, is the most important at a mass (which can be seen from the praises given in his honour, as if he had done something extraordinary), then this hypocrisy continues to be well in life. Man is no longer a work of "art of love," but of material art – an object that cannot be pushed around as one wishes. I am worried that we are at the liturgy like in the theatre, and then at home, we write reviews: "it was nice" or "it was boring." Fortunately, there are still places that make me leave the liturgy as a beautiful person! (a 47-year-old man).

I miss a priest – a man who could come and ask "How are you?" Who'd like to talk, have tea with us. To be closer to us, not so dignified, inaccessible. I'd also like to show him my support and cordiality. But it is what it is. We are a family, but what family? (a 35-year-old woman).

I think that if the Church were more silent, it would have more to say (a 50-year-old man).

Our times are full of hatred. People even hate God. But first they hate their children, other people. I was left alone with my husband after the stroke. I have a very difficult life, and I have a feeling that since I have been taking care of him, people have stopped noticing us. I'm thinking more and more about where the church is (a 48-year-old woman).

Why does the priest or the Church know how to live? Why not me? As I thought about it, I concluded that someone decides for me because I don't care about myself. I don't mean that I want to live contrary to the commandments, but that I don't understand the teachings of the Church since I let myself be treated like a child. And, in reality, I have to deal with adult matters. I know some learned formulas, I repeat what someone has taught me, but nothing comes of it. I can't translate it into a normal life (a 48-year-old man).

What relation?

The above (selected) statements have one common denominator: hunger for relations, hunger for a meeting, hunger for conversation. In times when the most frequent reason for suicides is the feeling of loneliness – and this in times of multiple forms of communication, living in a global village – close relations, mature bonds (but not ties) are the real “peak of dreams” (see: Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et misera* 3). At the same time, it is an excellent challenge for the Church, which was sent into the world not [only] to increase the number of souls, but to listen (see: ChV 291–298) and tell a story that gives hope (see: EG 286).¹⁵ However, “to develop maturity, that is to say, to reach the ability to make truly free and responsible decisions, time and great patience are essential” (EG 171). It is said that in Alaska, before the priest starts preaching, he first listens to people for one year. Not only does listening (*hearing*) give birth to faith but also creates a relationship that can develop into friendship over time. Jesus talked to Peter about such a friendship when entrusting him with building the Church.

Building relations – healthy human relationships from the earliest years of life – is a priority for catechesis and the entire sacramental ministry. The goal in both cases is communion with Jesus, which does not seem possible without communion with another person. The model that would pastorally respond to this need and at the same time meet the call for the new evangelization is

¹⁵ Francis: “Mary is the one who can transform a stable for animals into the house of Jesus, with poor diapers and with great tenderness” (EG 286).

the catechumenal model – recognized as fundamental in the Church documents. The reasons why this is considered the case are primarily related to the nature of the maturation: the education and formation of man to a mature faith requires *gradation* (see: DOC 89, OCWD 12–39). When adapting it to the stage of development, possibilities of candidates or their spiritual needs is a way to individualize the path of faith without giving up the participation of the community and in the community. The baptismal catechumenate is an inspiration for catechesis in general, at any age and in any situation – obviously concerning the pace and scope of matters to be considered *on the way*. Receiving each sacrament requires a long journey of initiation. However, the condition for preparing for the sacrament and living it out in a community of faith is the ability of that community to accompany candidates in conditions of their lives. That means, among other things, always being aware of a different context of life (see the conditions of adult catechesis mentioned above). The accompaniment does not force anything; it demands patience and mercy, as well as the witness of one's life – so that the candidate can say: "I see that Christ lives in you." Preparation in the community is not the same as the preparation of a group, but it is always an experience of a personal relationship with Christ in the continuity of the Church's tradition. The only exception here is the sacrament of the sick.

However, the catechumenal model is not exhaustive in the preparation and administration of the sacrament; the practice of mystagogic catechesis and the process of continuous conversion and deepening awareness of baptism (see: DOC 56–57) prove that both accompaniment and discernment require an individualised approach and continuous witness on the part of the ecclesial community. Being concerned with the relationship of friendship with all and guided by the dynamics of departure, journey and gift Francis evokes the image of a *polyhedron* (see: ChV 207), which the Church should be like (EG 21).¹⁶ Such is the way of holiness: "let Him shape in you that personal mystery which reflects Jesus Christ in the modern world" (GE 23), "do not fear holiness" (GE 31).

In this way of deepening faith, the Eucharist is a particular time for building relationships – the Eucharist builds the Church.¹⁷ Daily life is different, and we often have the impression that strangers, random people, uninitiated in the stage of faith in which they find themselves, have met with each other, and therefore do not experience joy in living the sacrament together. Many of them look down on others (either ungodly or devoted), profaning the presence

¹⁶ Cf. A. Durak, *Duchowość eucharystyczna*, [in:] *Duchowość współczesnego Kościoła*, op. cit., p. 31.

¹⁷ See: Z.J. Kijas, *Mistyczne Ciało Chrystusa*, "Życie Duchowe" 70 (2012), pp. 28–30.

of God-Love. Some feel unworthy of receiving the Cure, others feel unworthy of receiving the Cure, others do not care if they are taking communion, and yet others do not intend to do so. A large part is still made up of those to whom the so-called spiritual communion is offered, without inviting them to accompany or discern. Nevertheless, frequently there is also a community in the Eucharist that has undergone a profound initiation. Perhaps the difference in life explains why the Eucharist is not the sacrament of unity. That is what our Church today is like, this "field hospital" in the midst of which the Divine Doctor lives – and we, like nurses, bustle about (or not) sustaining the spirit of the afflicted. However, we cannot complain because we can be together to "bring the experience of God into the directness."¹⁸ God builds His tent in this reality: in everyday human life.

Since sacramental ministry incorporates us into the life of God, into His beauty, it bases on a liturgy that is full of *admiration*. What does that mean? People want and seek a beautiful liturgy. They want to be enchanted by the liturgy – it is for our body because we are carnal: it is supposed to "take over" us through signs, music, light, scents. Liturgy touches our *senses*: there are sounds, colours, smells, clothes, movements, attitudes, gestures, symbols (wine, water, bread, fire) – the liturgy embraces the whole of creation, the visible world. The beauty and vastness of the universe.¹⁹ The liturgy embraces sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. The liturgy is beautiful, and thereby it can be the liturgy of the whole day: "the liturgy of the hours." Why do we have so little liturgy in churches? Why do we limit pastoral ministry to the Eucharist itself? Why do we not allow everyone to participate in the Liturgy of the Hours?

The catechumenal model I have indicated is present in the Light-Life Movement. However, it must be remembered that it constantly requires adaptation to new conditions, new moderators, and a deep awareness that the Church of Jesus Christ is a community of service. It is a path that we follow together, one by one and with the other, to believe that HE is with us all days until the end of the world.

¹⁸ R. Hajduk, *Apologetyka pastoralna*, Krakow 2009, p. 171.

¹⁹ See: *ibidem*, pp. 177–191; A. Skowronek, *Wcielenie i Eucharystia*, "Życie Duchowe" 70 (2012), pp. 19–20.

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