

The Twenty-Ninth Liturgical Symposium *Historic and Contemporary Understanding of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation* (Łąd on the Warta, October 16, 2015)

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On the liturgical feast of St. Hedwig of Silesia on October 16, 2015, the Twenty-Ninth Liturgical Symposium in Łąd on the Warta, was held in the Major Seminary of the Society of St. Francis de Sales in Łąd on the Warta under the patronage of the Academic Society of St. Francis de Sales and Rev. Marek Chmielewski, SDB, the inspector of the Polish province of the Salesians. The theme of this year's meeting was: *The Historic and Contemporary Understanding of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation*.

The symposium brought together clergy and laypeople representing various academic centers as well as seminarians from seven seminaries. Approximately seventy people took part. The guest of honor was the auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of Świdnica, Dr. Adam Bałabuch, who since June 2011 has been the chairman of the Committee on Divine Worship and Sacramental Discipline of the Polish Episcopal Conference. The conference was opened by Rev. Dr. Hab. Mariusz Chamarczuk, SDB (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw), the rector of the seminary of the Society of St. Francis de Sales in Łąd on the Warta, after which the organizer greeted all the guests, presented the academic accomplishments of the speakers, and introduced the participants to the topic of the symposium.

Next, there was a presentation of the book commemorating the initiator of this academic event, the late Rev. Prof. Dr. Hab. Adam Durak, SDB. It was published on the tenth anniversary of his death. It was published under the title *Ecce domus mea* and was edited by Rev. Dr. Dariusz Sztuka, SDB, the abbot of the Salesian community in Łomianki. Next, Rev. Prof. Henryk Skorowski, SDB, the former rector of the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University, presented this year's Rev. Prof. Adam Durak, SDB, Award. This year, three awards for best BA, MA, or doctoral dissertation, each worth 2,000 zlotys, were presented. The

recipients of the award were Rev. Mirosław Pudło, SDB, for his MA dissertation *Pieśni wielkopostne w liturgii Kościoła rzymskokatolickiego* (“Lenten Songs in the Liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church”); deacon Artur Kołodziejczyk for his MA dissertation *Ety Hillesum droga do zawierzenia Bogu. Próba rekonstrukcji doświadczenia religijnego autorki zapisków „Przerwane życie”* (“Ety Hillesum’s Path to Entrusting God: An Attempt at Reconstructing the Religious Experience of the Author of the Diary An Interrupted Life”); and Leszek Gula for his MA thesis *Apologia Boskiej Osoby Ducha Świętego w odpowiedzi na antytrynitarną doktrynę świadków Jehowy* (“An Apology of the Divine Person of the Holy Spirit in Response to the Anti-Militaristic Doctrine of Jehovah’s Witnesses”). In the category for best publication, award worth 3,500 zlotys was presented to Rev. Dr. Hab. Piotr Kulbacki for his monograph *Liturgia w formacji człowieka ku wolności. Studium w świetle myśli ks. Franciszka Blachnickiego* (“The Liturgy in the Formation of the Person towards Freedom: A Study in Light of the Thought of Rev. Franciszek Blachnicki”), Wydawnictwo Polihymnia, Lublin 2013, 574 pp.

The first session consisted of the following papers: *The Current Work of the Liturgical Commission of the Polish Episcopal Conference* by Bishop Dr. Adam Bałabuch; *Significant Changes in Celebrating the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation over the Centuries* by Rev. Dr. Radosław Błaszczyk, SDB; and *What Novelties Does the Post-Conciliar Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation Bring?* by Rev. Prof. Dr. Hab. Helmut Sobeczko of the University of Opole. The first speaker, Bishop Dr. Adam Bałabuch, presented the current work of the Committee on Divine Worship and Sacramental Discipline of the Polish Episcopal Conference. Presently, its most important task is the translation from Latin into Polish of a new edition of the Roman missal approved by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. Work on this is at a stage that the Church in Poland will have a new translation of the missal within about five years. Next, Bishop Bałabuch presented the new edition of the lectionary. So far, five volumes have been published by the Pallottinum publisher in Poznan; they have been available for purchase since October 22, 2015. Soon, the *Service Book* (for readers and acolytes), which had not been hitherto available in Poland, will be published, as will the *Rite of Religious Profession*. Furthermore, the speaker introduced to the audience two documents that have been edited by the above-mentioned committee: the *Guidelines Concerning the Practice of the Exorcist’s Ministry* as well as the *Guidelines for Celebrating Mass in Small Groups*. Another challenge facing

the commission is the preparation of formation materials for altar servers as well as selecting one hymnal to be used across Poland and adopting it as the national one.

In his lecture, the second speaker summarized the history of celebrating the sacrament of penance and reconciliation from the times of the apostles up to the Second Vatican Council. As he noticed at the very beginning, this history is an excellent example that the privilege of absolving one of sins was performed in diverse ways. In the first centuries of Christianity, there was a very strong awareness of the social consequences of sin and of the social nature of penance. Then, the conviction that one should live without sinning was commonplace. As the speaker noted, we only have fragmentary information concerning the penitential practices from the post-apostolic times. Historical sources tell us that after being baptized, one could confess one's sins only once. There was no second chance for forgiveness. The literature also provides us with information about the sins committed by Christians at that time. Starting in the fourth century, public penance was done for mortal sins. It consisted of the professing of one's sins, doing a penance, and receiving absolution. From the initiative of the Irish clergy, frequent use of the sacrament of penance became common in the Middle Ages. The Fourth Lateran Council introduced mandatory confession before Easter. At the end of his presentation, Bishop Bałabuch presented the understanding and practice of the sacrament of penance and reconciliation after the Council of Trent. Afterwards, he introduced the next speaker, Rev. Prof. Dr. Hab. Helmut Sobeczko, who described the understanding of the sacrament of penance after the Second Vatican Council.

In the introduction to his presentation, Sobeczko reminded all those present at the symposium that the semantic meaning of the word "penance" is very broad. It encompasses the entirety of human existence. Quoting Pope Blessed Paul VI, Rev. Prof. Sobeczko noted that there is a need for a permanent metanoia, fidelity to the Ten Commandments, increasingly zealous exercising of one's duties, and patient bearing of life's difficulties. Reducing the word "penance" solely to the sacrament would greatly impoverish the word's meaning. In the next part, he presented the contribution of the Second Vatican Council to helping the faithful to judiciously experience the sacrament of penance and reconciliation. One of the many fruits of the work of the council fathers was the work *The Rites of Reconciliation*. The speaker showed this liturgical book to all who were present and encouraged them to make use of it when celebrating the sacrament of penance and reconciliation in parishes and

seminary communities. This book, he noted, shows the essential understanding of the Word of God while celebrating the sacrament of penance. At the end of his lecture, Sobeczko shared his pastoral experience and encouraged the priests and future priests present to celebrate in their parishes the rite of reconciliation of many penitents with an individual confession of sins and individual absolution, which is very rarely practiced in Poland.

The central moment of the liturgical symposium was the Eucharist celebrated under the direction of Bishop Dr. Adam Bałabuch for Rev. Prof. Adam Durak, SDB, on the tenth anniversary of his death. The liturgy was accompanied by the singing of a Gregorian chant by the seminary choir under the direction of Rev. Marcin Balawander, SDB. During the second session, Rev. Dr. Hab. Konrad Glombik (a professor of the University of Opole) spoke about *The Confessor Confronted by Ethical Problems Related to Sexuality*. Meanwhile, Rev. Dr. Hab. Erwin Mateja (a professor of the University of Opole) spoke about *The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation in the Liturgical Mystagogy*.

In his presentation, the first speaker demonstrated that the current ministry of the confessor in the Catholic Church involves new challenges. Every priest who celebrates the sacrament of penance and reconciliation should be knowledgeable about the following matters: bioethics, the protection of creation, social issues, and family and marital life. The paper did not deal with specific topics. Instead, it only signaled the fundamental and basic topics related to sexuality, which are necessary to know in order to fruitfully experience and celebrate the sacrament of penance and reconciliation. Next, Rev. Dr. Hab. Glombik discussed the practical dimension of asking questions, teaching, and giving advice to penitents with regards to sexual ethics. Referencing numerous statements by the Church, including Blessed Paul VI's encyclical *Persona humana* and the document of the Pontifical Council for the Family *Vademecum for Confessors Concerning Some Aspects of the Morality of Conjugal Life*, he encouraged priests to approach the penitent with great respect and discretion when dealing with the delicate area of sexuality. In practice, the confessor should remember the words that Pope Francis said to priests: "I want to remind priests that the confessional must not be a torture chamber but rather an encounter with the Lord's mercy which spurs us on to do our best" (apostolic adhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 44). At the end of his presentation, Rev. Dr. Hab. Glombik noted that the key to fruitfully celebrating the sacrament of penance and reconciliation is an attitude consisting of accompanying the penitent in the process of spiritual growth. Such a perspective can protect

the confessor from inappropriately celebrating the sacrament, while he in turn can ensure that the penitents properly and appropriately experience confession.

In his presentation, the last speaker focused on presenting liturgical mystagogy in the context of the sacrament of penance and reconciliation. The topic proposed to the speaker turned out to be a good opportunity to explain the meaning of the term “liturgical mystagogy.” As Rev. Dr. Hab. Erwin Mateja emphasized, not only do laypeople not understand it; neither does the clergy. Mystagogy should consist of a form of prophesying that would help the participants in the liturgy (in this case, in the liturgy of the sacrament of penance) to have a deeper understanding of experiencing this mystery, understanding its theological contents, and applying these mysteries to everyday life. The speaker cautioned his audience against committing the pastoral error of limiting sacramental mystagogy only for ceremonial instruction while completely avoiding theology and spirituality. In parish or specialized ministry, liturgical initiation to a good and fruitful experiencing of the holy sacraments should be adapted to different age groups. This requires engagement and effort on the part of priests, but, as Rev. Dr. Hab. Erwin Mateja recommended, the work is worth it. Next, the speaker mentioned theological topics present in the liturgy of celebrating the sacrament of penance and reconciliation. They are: the role of the persons of the Holy Trinity (God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in celebrating sacramental confession; God as the father of mercy; and the ecclesiastical dimension of the sacrament of penance. They should be present in the pastoral and formative impact of priests on their faithful. An excellent opportunity could be a community celebration of penance and reconciliation of many penitents with the individual confession of sins and absolution. Meanwhile, after reading the Gospel pericope, there should be an instruction for everyone. The above-mentioned topics could be their substantive contents. The lecture ended with the speaker’s statement that the presence of liturgical mystagogy in the context of the sacrament of penance could help the faithful to stop fearing confession; instead, they might see this sacrament as a means to reconciliation with God and with one’s neighbor.

After the two lectures of the second session, there was time for discussion, which gave the participants of the symposium an opportunity to bring up certain pastoral matters related to the celebration of the sacrament of penance and reconciliation as well as awakening and revitalizing the penitential mentality among the faithful. The topics that were brought up included:

confession to elderly and hearing repaired priests, the validity of confessing to people whose priestly ordination was not valid, understanding the name of the sacrament, and the pastoral crisis in Poland consisting of the rapid decline in the number of faithful participating in the sacraments of penance and reconciliation.

The organizer of the liturgical symposium in Łąd concluded the sessions. In his final speech, he thanked all the speakers for bringing the topic of the symposium closer to the audience. He praised those present at the symposium as well as the host, who put much effort into organizing this undertaking. He also announced the next meeting, which would deal with the sacrament of the anointing of the sick.