

Today we continue the liturgical participation of God's people.

The phrase "active participation" was not something chosen at random in 1963, nor was it the first time it had been used in official Vatican documents. In 1903, this phrase was coined by Pope Pius X in a document he wrote about the importance of music in the liturgy.

Why was this concept of active participation so important to these liturgical reformers? The format for the celebration of the Mass before the reform movement came from the Council of Trent (1545-1563). The "Tridentine Rite" of the Mass was created during a difficult time in the church when the church was more concerned with the valid celebration of the Mass than with the participation of the people.

Lay participation at the Mass was not considered important in order to show that the Mass was valid even when celebrated by the priest alone. Because of the focus on the priestly role at the Mass, the Mass was celebrated in Latin even though no one spoke the language. Translations of the Mass into modern languages were not permitted until the late 1800s under Pope Leo XIII.

In 1947, Pope Pius XII responded to the liturgical movement with a visionary encyclical on the liturgy entitled Mediator Dei. The pope spoke eloquently of the liturgy as an act of public worship, including all of its members. He stressed the importance of both interior and exterior participation by everyone at Mass.

Pope Pius XII understood both the physical and spiritual elements of human nature. He recognized the need for external - that is bodily - participation in the liturgies of the church, and stressed the interior - that is spiritual - participation so that the worshipers can be transformed to be Christ-like.

In 1951, Pope Pius XII reformed the liturgies of Holy Week, restoring their ancient meanings and settings. He also allowed for the "dialogue Mass" in which the priest would pray the prayers in an audible voice and the people would respond with the altar servers.