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Commentarii ad nuntia et studia de re liturgica
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DIO CASTIGA E SALVA *

«Io esalto il mio Dio e celebro il re del cielo» (*Tb* 13, 9). Chi pronuncia queste parole, nel Cantico or ora proclamato, è il vecchio Tobi, del quale l'Antico Testamento traccia una breve storia edificante, nel libro che prende il nome dal figlio Tobia.

Per comprendere pienamente il senso di questo inno, occorre tenere presenti le pagine narrative che lo precedono. La storia è ambientata tra gli israeliti esiliati a Ninive. Ad essi guarda l'autore sacro, che scrive molti secoli dopo, per additarli ai fratelli e sorelle di fede dispersi tra un popolo straniero e tentati di abbandonare le tradizioni dei Padri. Il ritratto di Tobi e della sua famiglia è offerto così come un programma di vita. Egli è l'uomo che, nonostante tutto, rimane fedele alle norme della legge, e in particolare alla pratica dell'elemosina. Su di lui si abbatte la sventura con il sopraggiungere della povertà e della cecità, ma non viene meno la sua fede. E la risposta di Dio non tarda a venire, attraverso l'angelo Raffaele, che guida il giovane Tobia in un rischioso viaggio, avviandolo a un matrimonio felice e infine guarendo il padre Tobi dalla cecità.

Il messaggio è chiaro: chi fa il bene, soprattutto aprendo il cuore alle necessità del prossimo, è gradito al Signore, e anche se viene provato, sperimenterà alla fine la sua benevolenza.

È su questo sfondo che prendono tutto il loro risalto le parole del nostro inno. Esse invitano a guardare in alto, a «Dio che vive in

* Ex allocutione die 25 iulii 2001 habita, durante audientia generali in area quae respicit basilicam Sancti Petri in Vaticano christifidelibus concessa (cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 26 luglio 2001).

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un semplice catalogo di personaggi illustri della Chiesa, bensì un *libro liturgico* riformato secondo il dettato del Concilio Vaticano II. Esso costituisce la base dei calendari liturgici che ogni anno determinano le feste sia del Signore che del Santorale. Perciò il Martirologio – secondo la tradizione – è stato nuovamente corredato di tutti gli elementi rituali per l'annuncio comunitario dopo un'ora canonica o in altri momenti della giornata: alla mensa o all'*officium capituli* per le comunità monastiche e canonicali. La lettura liturgica del Martirologio non ha lo scopo di comunicare notizie, ma di *celebrare* la santità di Cristo e dei suoi santi e annunciare ai cristiani che « non sono più stranieri e ospiti, ma concittadini dei santi e familiari di Dio » (*Ef* 2, 19), chiamati a proclamare le meraviglie di Cristo nei suoi servi e a imitarne gli esempi.

LITTERAE CONGREGATIONIS

Episcopus quidem nuper apud Congregationem de Cultu Divino et Disciplina Sacramentorum quaesivit an Episcopus dioecesanus sacerdotes eiusdem dioecesis obligatione adstringere possit ad admittendas mulieres vel puellas in servitium altaris. Dicasterium id opportunum duxit litteras eidem Episcopo Dioecesano exhibere, quae ob peculiare momentum etiam publici iuris fiunt.

A Bishop recently asked the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments whether a Diocesan Bishop would be able to oblige his priests to admit women and girls to service at the altar. This Dicastery has considered it opportune to send this letter to the Bishop in question, and given its particular importance to publish it here.

Prot. N. 2451/00/L

July 27, 2001

Your Excellency:

Further to recent correspondence, this Congregation resolved to undertake a renewed study of the questions concerning the possible admission of girls, adult women and women religious to serve alongside boys as servers in the Liturgy.

As part of this examination, this Dicastery consulted the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts which replied with a letter of July 23, 2001. The reply of the Pontifical Council was helpful in reaffirming that the questions raised by this Congregation, including the question of whether particular legislation could oblige individual priests in their celebration of the Holy Mass to make use of women to serve at the altar, do not concern the interpretation of the law, but rather are questions of the correct application of the law. The reply of

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the aforementioned Pontifical Council, therefore, confirms the understanding of this Dicastery that the matter falls within the competence of this Congregation as delineated by the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, § 62. Bearing in mind this authoritative response, this Dicastery, having resolved outstanding questions, was able to conclude its own study. At the present time, therefore, the Congregation would wish to make the following observations.

As is clear from the *Responsio ad propositum dubium* concerning can. 230, § 2 of the *Codex Iuris Canonici* of the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts and the directives of this Congregation, which the Holy Father had mandated in order to provide for the orderly implementation of what is set out in can. 230, § 2, and its authentic interpretation (cf. Circular Letter to the Presidents of Episcopal Conferences, Prot. n. 2482/93, March 15, 1994, see *Notitiae* 30 [1994] 333-335), the Diocesan Bishop, in his role as moderator of the liturgical life in the diocese entrusted to his care, has the authority to permit service at the altar by women within the boundaries of the territory entrusted to his care. Moreover his liberty in this question cannot be conditioned by claims in favor of a uniformity between his diocese and other dioceses which would logically lead to the removal of the necessary freedom of action from the individual Diocesan Bishop. Rather, after having heard the opinion of the Episcopal Conference, he is to base his prudential judgment upon what he considers to accord more closely with the local pastoral need for an ordered development of the liturgical life in the diocese entrusted to his care, bearing in mind, among other things, the sensibilities of the faithful, the reasons which would motivate such a permission, and the different liturgical settings and congregations which gather for the Holy Mass (cf. Circular Letter to the Presidents of Episcopal Conferences, March 15, 1994, no. 1).

In accord with the above cited instructions of the Holy See such an authorization may not, in any way, exclude men or, in particular, boys from service at the altar, nor require that priests of the diocese would make use of female altar servers, since "it will always be very

appropriate to follow the noble tradition of having boys serve at the altar" (Circular Letter to the Presidents of Episcopal Conferences, March 15, 1994, no. 2). Indeed, the obligation to support groups of altar boys will always remain, not least of all due to the well known assistance that such programs have provided since time immemorial in encouraging future priestly vocations (cf. *ibid.*).

With respect to whether the practice of women serving at the altar would truly be of pastoral advantage in the local pastoral situation, it is perhaps helpful to recall that the non-ordained faithful do not have a right to service at the altar, rather they are capable of being admitted to such service by the Sacred Pastors (cf. Circular Letter to the Presidents of Episcopal Conferences, March 15, 1994, no. 4, cf. also can. 228, § 1, Interdicasterial Instruction *Ecclesiae de mysterio*, August 15, 1997, no. 4, see *Notitiae* 34 [1998] 9-42). Therefore, in the event that Your Excellency found it opportune to authorize service of women at the altar, it would remain important to explain clearly to the faithful the nature of this innovation, lest confusion might be introduced, thereby hampering the development of priestly vocations.

Having thus confirmed and further clarified the contents of its previous response to Your Excellency, this Dicastery wishes to assure you of its gratitude for the opportunity to elaborate further upon this question and that it considers this present letter to be normative.

With every good wish and kind regard, I am, Sincerely yours in Christ,

Jorge A. Card. MEDINA ESTÉVEZ
Prefect

Mons. Mario MARINI
Under Secretary