

## The Second Vatican Council

Every once in a while in the life of the Church, we have COUNCILS, where we gather leaders of the Church together to talk

about and vote on pressing issues.

The first council of the Church was the Council of Jerusalem, which is in the Bible. The last such council started fifty years ago, on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 1962, and it ushered in a number of changes for the Church. The process involved a vote among the thousands of bishops around the world on various reforms, etc. (it isn't just decided by the Pope, but involves needing direct majorities of the bishops of the world to approve these documents), and in this last council, thousands of other Catholics and Christians from other denominations were brought in as observers and advisers.

**The impetus, behind the Second Vatican Council might be summed up by this statement by then-Pope John XXII: That he wanted to “respond to the grave state of spiritual poverty in the world.”**

So, a big message from the documents of the Second Vatican Council was **“the Universal Call to Holiness.”**

That, as we can read in LUMEN GENTIUM ch 5, “Every person should walk to follow Jesus.” So, married, single, religious life, priesthood, diaconate, etc., all offer a chance for a man or woman to grow in holiness before God. This thinking was also updated by Pope John Paul II in apostolic letter “At the Beginning of the New Millennium.” (you can access all of these docs. and Vat II at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).)

Another big issue for the Second Vatican Council, responding to the “grave spiritual poverty” of their time, was, then also, **EVANGELIZATION**: To spread the Good News. This meant, for one thing, that the Church needed to start **ENGAGING THE CULTURE**. Paul VI said at this time that “Evangelization is not something that we do, it’s the fundamental bottom line of who we are.” This has been a big theme of the Church in the years since. **Connected with this idea of “evangelization” was also taking a less confrontational stance toward others in the world, and, instead, promoting more dialogue with the world** → That is, to not be overly confrontative of those who don’t agree to us, but to get into dialogue. This is why Vatican II ushered in specific changes in our liturgy that took out direct attacks upon Jewish people (for example, the term, “pefidious Jews” was taken out of the Good Friday liturgy -- the word means “untrustworthy” – and was actually said, as part of our liturgy at masses around the world for generations), and a lot of attention was paid on how to talk to and work with Christians of other denominations, non-Christians religious people, agnostics, atheists, etc. → and the idea was to bring us into dialogue more, not to automatically condemn anyone outside of the Church.

But the Second Vatican Council did not “water down” the faith or take away the notion that we would want to invite people into our Church and into a closer walk with Jesus through our Church, but it did also talk about being able to see, with love, other Christian communities, Jewish people, Muslim people, all people of faith, and non-believers. A significant piece of this teaching is how we handle the notion of “who is saved.” The Church went on record here as saying that non-Catholics and non-



YEAR OF FAITH<sup>2012</sup><sub>2013</sub>

Christians and people of no faith can be saved. You can read about this in *Lumen Gentium*" Ch. 1. Again, the Church does feel that Jesus calls us to "baptize all nations" and to bring others into His Church, so we still are called to evangelize and to call people into our Church.

A contribution of the Catholic leaders from the United States, was that **the Roman Catholic Church would always promote the free practice and equal treatment of all religious groups** – that the Church would promote freedom of conscience for all people in the world.

Finally, another major theme of the Second Vatican Council was, in looking at "the spiritual poverty" of the world, was **a renewal of the Catholic mass, sacraments and religious practices**. This was done by looking at the history of the development of our sacraments. So, for example, the bishops of the world and looked at the spiritual history of the Catholic Church, especially the early centuries of the Church, and made some decisions about the liturgy based on those decisions. Namely:

1. That the mass had been central to the life of the early Catholics, and therefore mass should be the "source and summit" of all Christian life (*Lumen Gentium*, ch. 11.)
2. That the early Christians had been very immersed in Scripture, and so Scripture needed to be central to the lives of Christians today, and so, more Scripture was brought into the mass, and Scripture was brought into all the sacraments.
3. They bishops and advisers at Vatican II also compared the practices of the early Church of the apostles (or "apostolic Church") with the practices in subsequent centuries. Their idea was to try to gain the best from, especially, the practice of the mass and sacraments from the early centuries of the Church. So, for example, the "sign of peace" and the "prayer of the faithful" were put back into the mass with Vat II because these had been present in the mass in the early centuries of the Church and the Council leaders felt that they had had a positive impact on the liturgy, and so should be returned to the normal practice of the mass today. This is also the reason that the Order of Deacons was revived, because it had had a positive impact on the early Church (there were deacons in the Church from the time of the Bible until the 800's.)
4. "The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," also spoke about using local languages for mass; "...Since the use of the vernacular...may be frequently be of great advantage to the people." (So, it is up to the bishops – officially since 1971 -- in each world language group (English, Spanish, French, etc.) to make these decisions for the people in their language group. Note that attempts have *been made to respect the feelings of those Catholics who prefer the mass in Latin, and the mass is offered in Latin in our area in Baltimore and in at several DC locations.*
5. Finally, in terms of "renewal" of Catholic practice, in the "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy" (1963), the bishops of the world wanted to communicate that just getting the rules ("rubrics") right in how the mass is celebrated is not enough, that Catholics must be aware of what is going on at the mass, and involve themselves in the liturgy.
  - a. This is one reason I like to have "Teaching Masses" in our parish, on occasion (the next one is on Tues. Oct. 2<sup>nd</sup> at 7:30pm) where the people of the parish can learn what is happening at the mass. The Vatican II document "Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery" (1967), says, "*Instruction about the mass....should also be given in a variety of ways. If necessary, short directives to be spoken by the priest or competent minister should be provided within the rites themselves.*" )

**Coming Next weekend, a FLIER ON THE YEAR OF FAITH**