LEO XIV

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 20 May 2026
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Initial Greeting of the Holy Father to His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Peace be with you.

Brothers and sisters, I am very happy to welcome His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia of the Armenian Apostolic Church, together with the distinguished delegation accompanying him. This fraternal visit represents an important opportunity to strengthen the bonds of unity that already exist between us, as we move towards full communion between our Churches.

Your Holiness, in these days when we prepare for Pentecost, I invoke the grace of the Holy Spirit upon your pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, and I invite all those present to pray fervently to the Lord that your visit and meetings may constitute a further step on the path towards full unity. Let us also pray for peace in Lebanon and the Middle East, once again torn apart by violence and war.

Your Holiness, I wish to express my particular gratitude for your constant personal commitment to ecumenism, especially to the international theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

Welcome, Your Holiness, dear bishops and dear friends! Together, let us invoke the intercession of Saint Gregory the Illuminator, Saint Gregory of Nareg, Saint Nerses the Gracious and, above all, the Virgin Mother of God, that they may enlighten our path towards the fullness of that unity we all desire.

Catechesis. The Documents of the Second Vatican Council. III. Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium. *1. The liturgy in the mystery of the Church*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

Today we are beginning a new series of catecheses on the first Document issued by the Second Vatican Council: the Constitution on the sacred liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (*SC*).

In drafting this Constitution, the Council Fathers sought not only to undertake a reform of the rites, but to lead the Church to contemplate and deepen that living bond which constitutes and unites her: the mystery of Christ. Indeed, the liturgy touches the very hear of this mystery: it is at once the space, the time and the context in which the Church receives her very life from Christ. For in the liturgy, "the work of our redemption is accomplished" (*SC*, 2), which makes us a chosen lineage, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people whom God has acquired for Himself (cf. *1 Pet* 2:9).

As manifested by the threefold renewal – biblical, patristic and liturgical – that the Church underwent through the course of the twentieth century, the Mystery in question does not designate an obscure reality, but God's salvific plan, hidden from all eternity and revealed in Christ, according to Saint Paul's affirmation (cf. *Eph* 3:2-6). Here, then, is the Christian Mystery: the Paschal event, that is to say, the passion, death, resurrection and glorificatior of Christ, which is made sacramentally present to us precisely in the liturgy, so that every time we take part in the assembly gathered "in his name" (cf. *Mt* 18:20) we are immersed i this Mystery.

Christ Himself is the inner source of the mystery of the Church, the holy people of God, born from His side pierced on the cross. In the holy liturgy, through the power of His Spirit, He continues to act. He sanctifies and unites the Church, His bride, to His offering to the Father. He exercises His utterly unique priesthood, He who is present in the proclaimed Word, in the sacraments, in the ministers who celebrate, in the gathered community and, in the highest degree, in the Eucharist (cf. SC, 7). Thus, according to Saint Augustine (cf. *Sermon*, 272), in celebrating the Eucharist the Church receives the Body of the Lord and becomes what she receives: she becomes the Body of Christ, "a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (*Eph* 2:22). This is the "work of our redemption", which conforms us to Christ and builds us up in communion.

In the holy liturgy, this communion is achieved through "rites and prayers" (*SC*, 48). The rituality of the Church expresses her faith – in accordance with the familiar saying *lex orandi, lex credendi* – and at the same time shapes ecclesial identity: the proclaimed Word the celebration of the Sacrament, the gestures, the silences, the space – all this represents and gives form to the people gathered by the Father, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Every celebration thus becomes a true epiphany of the Church in prayer, as Saint John Paul II recalled (Apostolic Letter *Vicesimus quintus annus*, 9).

If the liturgy is at the service of the mystery of Christ, one understands why it has been defined as "the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed ... the font from which all her power flows" (*SC*, 10). It is true that the action of the Church is not limited to the liturgy alone; however, all her activity (preaching, service to the poor, the accompaniment of human realities) converges towards this "summit". Conversely, the liturgy sustains the faithful by immersing them ever and anew in the Pasch of the Lord and thus, through the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments and communal prayer, they are refreshed, encouraged and renewed in their commitment to faith and in their mission. In other words, the participation of the faithful in the liturgical action is at once "internal" and "external".

This also means that it is called to unfold in a tangible way throughout daily life, in an ethical and spiritual dynamic, so that the liturgy celebrated is translated into life and demands a faithful existence, capable of making concrete what has been experienced in the celebration: it is in this way that our life becomes a "living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God", fulfilling our "spiritual worship" (*Rom* 12:1).

In this way, “the liturgy daily builds up those who are within into a holy temple of the Lor d” (*SC*, 2), and forms an open community, welcoming to all. Indeed, it is inhabited by the Holy Spirit, it introduces us into the life of Christ, it makes us His Body and, in all its dimensions, it represents a sign of the unity of the entire human race in Christ. As Pope Francis said, “the world still does not know it, but everyone is invited to the supper of the wedding of the Lamb (*Rev* 19:9)” (Apostolic Letter *Desiderio desideravi*, 5).

Dear friends, let us allow ourselves to be shaped inwardly by the rites, symbols, gestures and above all the living presence of Christ in the liturgy, which we will have the opportunity to explore in the coming Catecheses.

Special greetings:

I greet this morning all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, particularly the groups from England, Ireland, Tanzania, India, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Canada and the United States of America, as well as the Patrons of the Arts in the Vatican Museums from Canada. Upon all of you, and upon your families, invoke the joy and peace of the risen Jesus! God bless you!

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear Brothers and Sisters, as we continue our series of catecheses on the Second Vatican Council, today we consider the Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. This document teaches that the liturgy immerses us in the mystery of Christ’s passion, death, resurrection and glorification. Through liturgical rites and prayers, and by the power of the Spirit, Jesus exercises his priesthood and sanctifies the Church, his spouse, uniting her to his own oblation to the Father. Indeed, Christ is present in the word that is proclaimed, in the sacraments, in the ministers, in the community, and most of all in the Eucharist. Let us allow ourselves to be shaped from within by the rites, symbols, gestures and above all by the living presence of Christ in the liturgy, which we will have further opportunity to explore.

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The HOLY SEE

LEO XIV

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 27 May 2026
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Catechesis. The Documents of the Second Vatican Council. III. Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. 2. *The reform of the liturgy: tradition and development*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

In the Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, the Venerable Pius XII writes that "the Church is without question a living organism, and as an organism, in respect of the sacred liturgy also, she grows, matures, develops, adapts and accommodates herself to temporal needs and circumstances, provided only that the integrity of her doctrine be safeguarded" (no. 59).

In full accordance with this principle, the Second Vatican Council, in the Introduction to the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (*SC*), recognizes "particularly cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the liturgy" (no. 1). The Council assembly was gathered, in fact, with the desire to "impart an ever increasing vigour to the Christian life of the faithful; to adapt more suitably to the needs of our own times those institutions which are subject to change; to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ; to strengthen whatever can help to call the whole of mankind into the household of the Church" (*ibid.*).

At that moment in history, there was a strong sense of the need for a renewal of the ritual forms through which, for centuries, the Church had glorified God and sanctified the Christian people. Thanks to the Liturgical Movement, the conviction had matured—later expressed by Saint John Paul II—that "a very close and organic bond exists between the renewal of the liturgy and the renewal of the whole life of the Church. The Church not only acts but also expresses herself in the liturgy, lives by the liturgy and draws from the liturgy the strength for her life" (Letter *Dominicae Cenae*, 13).

To encourage the access of the faithful to the richness of the gifts of grace dispensed by the sacred liturgy, the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* thus indicates, with a very effective phrase, the direction to take: "That sound tradition may be retained, and yet the way remain open to legitimate progress" (*SC*, 23).

Pope Benedict XVI grasped in this declaration of intent the "reform programme" of the Council Fathers, "a balance between the great liturgical tradition of the past and that of the future", noting that "tradition and progress are often clumsily opposed", whereas "actually, the two concepts merge: tradition is a living reality, which therefore includes in itself the principle of development, of progress. It is as if to say that the river of tradition also carries its source in itself and flows towards the outlet" (*Address to participants in the Congress promoted by the Pontifical Athenaeum of Saint Anselm on the 50th anniversary of foundation*, 6 May 2011).

The Council affirms the legitimacy of this progress, rooted in authentic Tradition, distinguishing within the liturgy "immutable elements, divinely instituted" from "elements subject to change [which] not only may but ought to be changed with the passage of time if they have suffered from the intrusion of anything out of harmony with the inner nature of the liturgy or have become unsuited to it" (*SC*, 21). Changes of this type have taken place constantly over the centuries in order to enable the faithful to participate fruitfully, through ritual actions, in the Paschal Mystery of Christ, the foundation of the Christian faith. The Church's worship has thus been "embodied" in the cultural forms of each age and has been able to influence them and even transform them. The liturgy has thus been, for centuries, a driving force for evangelization. Today, this energy must be renewed in continuity with the authentic and living Catholic tradition, that is, in accordance with a dynamic aimed at introducing believers to the fullness of the truth.

It is therefore understandable why the Council Fathers recommended that the revision of the rites, when “the good of the Church genuinely and certainly requires them”, must be carried out taking care that “any new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing” (*SC*, 23). For the good of the entire Church, every reform must always be preceded by careful “theological, historical and pastoral” investigation (*ibid.*). The Council Magisterium, in this way, thus calls for the avoidance of confusion amongst the faithful, discouraging anyone from adding, removing or altering anything in liturgical matters on their own initiative (cf. *SC*, 22). The progress evoked in the Conciliar Constitution in no way compromises ecclesial communion: rather, it seeks to confirm and foster it.

I therefore urge all those called to prepare the celebration of the divine mysteries, in particular priests who exercise the ministry of liturgical presidency, to always uphold that respect for the texts and regulations of the liturgy which springs from an inner attitude of openness and trust in God, manifesting humility before His greatness and sincere fidelity to ecclesial communion.

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APPEAL

I am following with concern the war in Ukraine, which has intensified significantly in recent days. I wish to express my solidarity with all those suffering as a result of the recent attacks, which have also targeted civilians.

War does not solve problems; it exacerbates them. It does not build security; it multiplies suffering and hatred. Where missiles and drones fall, hopes are crushed, homes and places of worship are destroyed, and innocent lives are cut short.

I entrust all peoples stricken by war to the protection of the Virgin Mary, Queen of Peace.

Special greetings:

I greet the English speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s audience, in particular the groups from England, Ireland, Cameroon, Kenya and Nigeria, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, South Korea, Canada and the United States of America. May the peace of God guard your minds and your hearts that you may know the love of Jesus Christ and joyfully share it with others. God bless you!

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear brothers and sisters, in today's reflection on *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, we consider the liturgy through the lens of tradition and of development. Pope Pius XII called the Church a "living organism" which needs to grow, mature and adapt to circumstances. Indeed, desiring that Christian life should thrive and grow, the Second Vatican Council recognized that it was time to adjust some adaptable elements in the liturgy for the health and vitality of the Church, to fortify and rejuvenate Christians, and to foster unity and evangelize men and women. The Council affirmed that legitimate progress in the liturgy must also preserve sound tradition, and that certain elements of the liturgy can not change because they are divinely instituted. In a particular way, I encourage everyone to respect the texts and norms of the liturgy with openness, humility, trust in God's greatness and with sincere fidelity to ecclesial communion.

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LEO XIV

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 3 June 2026
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Catechesis. The Documents of the Second Vatican Council. III. Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium. *3. Rite, sign and symbol*

Dear brothers and sisters,

As we continue our catechesis on the Conciliar Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC), we wish to pause and reflect on some of the fundamental elements of the sacred liturgy, such as the rite, the sign and the symbol.

The Second Vatican Council, building on the valuable work of the Liturgical Movement, has helped us to rediscover a truth that was very much alive in the consciousness of the early Church and in the teaching of the Fathers. The rites of the Christian liturgy are not a mere external covering of the sacramental mystery, a collection of arbitrary ceremonies, but are the ecclesial mediation through which the divine gift reaches us. Precisely for this reason, the Council invites us to understand the Mysterium fidei which is realized in the liturgy through rites and prayers (cf. *SC*, 48).

The rite gives shape to liturgical action and, through it, to our lives, generating a spiritual sensibility in us that makes us capable of savouring the presence of God through Jesus Christ. Naturally, this happens if we do not remain strangers or silent spectators (cf. ibid.) with regard to the liturgy, but rather participate in it fully — body, mind and heart — in obedience to the Lord's command. Through the sacred rite we are thus formed in listening to the Word of God, in giving thanks and in adoration, in fraternal sharing and in ecclesial communion. We discover that we are an assembly with many faces, united by the same faith.

The rite involves us in a well-defined sequence of gestures and prayers, which can sometimes be at odds with with our individual tendency towards spontaneity. Its logic, however, is not to constrain freedom within rigid frameworks. On the contrary, with the solemn simplicity of its rhythms, the rite interrupts our frenetic activities, leading us back to what is essential. We thus discover another dimension of action that is not guided by calculations of productivity, and another experience of time and space. In the rite, we experience a logic of gratuitousness, we find a pause that regenerates the heart, we recognize that we are preceded by divine grace and we learn to live in a rhythm inhabited by the Holy Spirit.

The grammar of the rite is interwoven with the signs and symbols proper to the liturgy. In it, as the Council states, "the sanctification of the man is signified by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which corresponds with each of these signs" (*SC*, 7). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explores the value of these signs, recalling that "their meaning is rooted in the work of creation and in human culture, specified by the events of the Old Covenant and fully revealed in the person and work of Christ" (no. 1145). The sign of water is emblematic: from the origins of Creation to the Flood, from the crossing of the Red Sea to the Jordan, right up to the water flowing from Christ's side, which becomes a sacramental sign of immersion in his death and resurrection.

“Sign” and “symbol” are terms that are often used as synonyms. In reality, a sign is symbolic when it is able to refer not only to an idea, but to an entire system of meanings and values. In this way, for example, when we are sprinkled with holy water, our awareness of the gift received at Baptism and our commitment to new life in Christ is rekindled. Secondly, symbols are essentially practical in nature, being first and foremost actions: some simple and common, such as kneeling and exchanging the sign of peace, or more demanding, such as the constitutive acts of each Sacrament. Above all, symbols have a unique performative and transformative dimension, both in relation to the material elements of which they are composed and to those who come into contact with them, engendering a sense of belonging, touching the heart and mind, and giving rise to authentic ecclesial relationships.

In the Apostolic Letter *Desiderio desideravi*, Pope Francis, echoing a statement by Romano Guardini, identified “the first task of the work of liturgical formation: man must become once again capable of symbols” (no. 44). We need to allow ourselves to be educated by the rites of the liturgy, caring for the beauty of our celebrations with a delicate touch and without arbitrariness, and committing ourselves to an authentic mystagogy. The experience of a living and devout liturgy, accompanied by appropriate mystagogical catechesis, is the best resource for reawakening in everyone that openness to the encounter with God which, in the logic of the Incarnation, can only take place by involving the whole person: spirit, soul and body (cf. 1 Thess 5:23).

Special greetings:

I greet all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, particularly the groups from England, Sweden, Australia, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, South Korea, Canada, and the United States of America. I greet in particular the scholars and participants in the conference “Revising the World Medical Association Declaration of Taipei” and the organizing partners of the Global Summit, “Fostering Hope for Children.” As we prepare for the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, let us be strengthened by this divine gift and become witnesses of his love to all we encounter. God bless you!

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear brothers and sisters, in our series of catecheses on the Second Vatican Council, we continue our reflection on *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, by looking at the elements of the rite, the sign, and the symbol found in the sacred liturgy. The rite of the Christian liturgy is the ecclesial mediation through which the divine gift reaches us. In the liturgy, we are invited to participate — body, mind, and heart — and enter into a dimension inhabited by the Holy Spirit. In order to enter into this dimension, the liturgy is woven with signs and symbols tha have a performative and transformative dimension. For example, kneeling is a sign of our worship of God while exchanging the sign of peace points to our ecclesial communion. Further, signs help us to recall the constitutive acts of the Sacraments as when we are sprinkled with holy water we remember our commitment to Christ. As we prepare for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, may each of us reawaken our openness to an encounter with God by rediscovering the signs and symbols of the sacred liturgy.

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LEO XIV

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 24 June 2026
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Catechesis. The Documents of the Second Vatican Council. III. Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium. *4. The Mystery of the Eucharist*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

We will continue our catechesis on the documents of the Second Vatican Council, particularly the Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium (SC) on the Liturgy.

When Saint Augustine wanted to explain the mystery of the Body of Christ to those who were newly baptized, he took up the passage from Saint Paul that we have just heard: “Now you are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it.” (1 Cor 12:27). He adds: “It is your own mystery that you receive. To what you are, you respond: Amen, and your response is like your signature. You are told, ‘The Body of Christ,’ and you reply, ‘Amen.’ Be therefore members of the Body of Christ, so that your Amen may be true. [...] Be what you see, and receive what you are” (*Sermon* 272: PL 38, 1247).

Immediately after recalling Jesus' Last Supper, the Constitution on the Liturgy speaks of the Eucharist in these Augustinian terms. For Christians, taking part at the Lord's table means being "instructed by God's word and ... nourished ... [giving] thanks to God" (cf. SC 48). It is by receiving Him in His Word and in the Eucharist that we become what we receive. We become the Body whose Head is the risen Christ, seated at the right hand of the Father (cf. Col 1:18), who prepares a place for us in heaven (cf. Jn 14:3). Thus, the Eucharist is the sacrament of the Kingdom that is to come. It is the Bread for the journey that leads us to our heavenly homeland, until that blessed day when "God will be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

The liturgical assembly offers the Sacrifice "not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him" (SC, 48). From this perspective, the Eucharist is the form of the spiritual sacrifice of Christians (cf. Heb 13:16; Rom 12:1), as the path to union with God and with one another. By participating in it, they learn "to offer themselves; through Christ the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and with each other" (ibid.). Thus, by incorporating us into Christ, the Eucharist teaches us to adopt the very style of life of the Lord Jesus, which was marked by the free gift of Himself. This gift draws us into the dynamic of unity, offering a powerful antidote to the forces of division that undermine our world, our communities, our families, and our hearts (cf. SC, 47).

Dear brothers and sisters, when we participate in the Eucharist, we are invited to listen to the Word of God and to be nourished at the Lord's table, where He offers Himself to the Father. These two parts of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, "are so closely connected with each other that they form but one single act of worship" (SC, 56).

With regard to the Word of God, it is important to remember that it is not merely a matter of acquiring intellectual knowledge of the Scriptures, but of receiving the Word that is "living and effective" (Heb 4:12), spoken by God to everyone and at the same time to each individual. This Word nourishes and sustains us together with the Eucharistic Bread and leads us from the decay of sin to new life in Christ. "The Eucharist opens us to an understanding of Scripture, just as Scripture for its part illumines and explains the mystery of the Eucharist." (Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 55).

The Second Vatican Council called for the treasures of the Bible to be opened more abundantly, so that a richer fare from the table of God's Word might be provided for the faithful (cf. SC, 51). The liturgical reform translated this request into the treasure that is the *Lectionary*, the book that gathers all the biblical readings for liturgical celebrations. This richness has been drawn from the purest source of the living Tradition, which combines fidelity with tradition; with openness to legitimate progress (cf. SC, 23).

The beginning of Chapter II of the Constitution on the Liturgy is woven with references to the great river of Tradition, that continues from the Fathers of the Church down to us. I will quote from it: "At the Last Supper, on the night when He was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the eucharistic sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is eaten, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us." (SC, 47).

Dear brothers and sisters, let us draw with faith from this source of divine life and allow ourselves to be transformed by the mystery we celebrate.

Special greetings:

I greet this morning all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, particularly groups from England, Sweden, Malawi, Tanzania, Indonesia, Singapore, South Korea, Canada and the United States of America. Upon all of you and your families, I invoke the peace and joy of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear brothers and sisters, as we continue our series of catecheses on the Second Vatican Council, today we consider the celebration of the Eucharist as presented by the Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* This sacred mystery is described in the second chapter of the document as "a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, 'a paschal banquet in which Christ is received, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us'" (n. 47). The Constitution also emphasises that at Mass, the faithful are not passive spectators. Rather, all are encouraged to offer themselves in union with Jesus Christ, the spotless victim, to the Father, through the hands of the priest and together with him. Participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice also means being formed by God's word and nourished at the table of the Lord's body. Indeed, these two parts of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Word and the Eucharistic Liturgy, "are so closely connected with each other that they form but one single act of worship" (n. 56). Brothers and sisters, as we seek our nourishment from this abundant source of divine life, let us allow ourselves to be transformed by the mystery we celebrate.

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LEO XIV

GENERAL AUDIENCE

St. Peter's Basilica
Wednesday, 5 August 2026
[**Multimedia**]

Catechesis. The Documents of the Second Vatican Council. III. Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium. 5. *The prayer of the Church*

Brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

In this catechism, we will resume our reflection on the Conciliar Constitution on the liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (*SC*). Today we will look at the ecclesial dimension of liturgical prayer.

As the Apostle Paul suggests, it is the Holy Spirit who teaches us to pray. From the day of Pentecost, the Spirit dwells in the Church, inspiring every one of her activities and, in particular, prayer. The life of the first community, born in Jerusalem after the Pasch of Jesus, is life in the Spirit given by the risen Lord. "From that time onwards the Church has never failed to come together to celebrate the paschal mystery: reading those things 'which were in all the scriptures concerning him' (*Lk* 24:27), celebrating the Eucharist in which 'the victory and triumph of his death are again made present', and at the same time giving thanks 'to God for his unspeakable gift' (*2 Cor* 9:15) in Christ Jesus, 'in praise of his glory' (*Eph*. 1:12), through the power of the Holy Spirit" (*SC*, 6).

In our time, in contexts dominated by an efficiency-driven and consumerist mindset, prayer may seem pointless and trivial. In a world where science and technology claim to provide all the answers, praying may appear to be a form of escapism. Furthermore, even in many Christian families, the tradition of prayer is no longer passed on, whilst many people risk confusing it with just another technique, of a psychological nature aimed at personal well-being. Prayer, however, as a fundamental dimension of our humanity, is worth rediscovering in its true form.

The Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* took this need seriously. This greatly pleased Pope Saint Paul VI, who, on promulgating this first document approved by the Second Vatican Council, stated: "God comes first; prayer is our primary duty; the liturgy is the primary source of the divine life communicated to us, the primary school of our spiritual life" (*Address,* Saint Peter's Basilica, 4 December 1963).

Indeed, in the Constitution, the term "prayer" designates the liturgy as a whole. This perspective is decisive, for it guided the liturgical reform, making the active participation o the faithful its central pillar. The liturgy is presented first and foremost as the place of encounter, of God's initiative in drawing near to humanity in his Son, "the Word made flesh anointed by the Holy Spirit" (*SC*, 5), to whom we may respond "through Christ, with Christ and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit", that is to say, thanks to "the very prayer which Christ Himself, together with His Body, addresses to the Father" (*SC*, 84).

For this reason, Saint Paul VI ardently desired that the Liturgy of the Hours, the Church's daily public prayer, inseparable from the Eucharist, might deeply permeate, enliven, guide and express all Christian prayer, and effectively nourish the spiritual life of the People of God (cf. Apostolic Constitution *Laudis canticum*).

For this desire to be fulfilled, the Liturgy of the Hours needs to be more fully embraced and lived out in the daily lives of the baptized and of the communities. To the many people who wish to learn to pray, especially catechumens, it can offer the path and the school of Christian prayer.

Every week and every day, the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours are the breath of the life of the Church, which makes the Holy Spirit circulate through her Body. In this prayer, Christ "joins the entire community of mankind to Himself, associating it with His own singing of this canticle of divine praise" (*SC*, 83). In this way, day by day, we are ever more united with the Paschal Mystery and conformed to him.

Saint Augustine affirms that “When we speak to God in prayer for mercy, we do not separate the Son from Him; and when the Body of the Son prays, it separates not its Head from itself: and it is one Saviour of His Body, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who both prays for us, and prays in us, and is prayed to by us. He prays for us, as our Priest; He prays in us, as our Head; He is prayed to by us, as our God. Let us therefore recognize in Him our words, and His words in us” (*Enarr. in psalmum LXXXVI: PL* 37, 1081).

Bound to the Eucharist, whose light it prolongs, the Liturgy of the Hours sanctifies the time of our daily lives: in the morning, we begin the day with faith and gratitude; at midday, we ask for the strength to remain faithful amidst our labours; in the evening, once our work is done, Vespers accompany the moment of sunset; at night, we fall asleep entrusting ourselves to God’s peace. Each Hour is an act of hope: during our earthly pilgrimage, we keep watch, awaiting with the whole Church the glorious return of the Lord.

Special greetings

I extend a warm welcome to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially those from England, Malta and the United States of America. Upon you and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you all!

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters,

In our continuing series of catecheses on the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, today we turn our attention to the ecclesial dimension of the Church's liturgical prayer. Far from avoiding the world and its needs, all prayer, especially in the entire liturgy, is the essential dimension of our humanity. In our prayer we unite ourselves with Jesus to offer praise and thanksgiving to God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit. In a particular way, Saint Paul VI expressed a longing that the Liturgy of the Hours, the daily public prayer of the Church, would be prayed by all the members of Christ's Body. In this way, we will allow the Holy Spirit to breathe into each thought and action, inspiring a deeper experience of the Paschal Mystery. My brothers and sisters, may we find the spiritual nourishment necessary on our earthly pilgrimage by joining with the whole Church in her liturgical prayer as we await the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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LEO XIV

GENERAL AUDIENCE

St Peter's Basilica
Wednesday, 12 August 2026
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Catechesis. The Documents of the Second Vatican Council. III. Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium. *6. The liturgical year*

Dear brothers and sisters,

The fifth chapter of the Conciliar Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (*SC*) is dedicated to the liturgical year, a theme we would like to look at today, to explain its value in the life of every believer.

First of all, it is important to note that this way of referring to the cycle of Christian feasts as the ‘liturgical year’ became widespread in ecclesiastical language thanks to the work of the Servant of God, Abbot Prosper Guéranger (1805–1875).

In the Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, Pope Pius XII states that it "is not a cold and lifeless representation of the events of the past, or a simple ... record of a former age. [The liturgical year] is rather Christ Himself who is ever living in His Church. Here He continues that journey of immense mercy which He lovingly began in His mortal life ... with the design of bringing men to know His mysteries and in a way live by them. These mysteries are ever present and active" (III Divinum Officium et Annus Liturgicus, II Cyclus Mysteriorum). The liturgical year should thus be understood as a constant renewal of the work of salvation which Christ accomplishes in history. As she journeys through this temporal cycle, the Church remains in contact with the Lord's redemptive action, so that al the faithful may be filled with His grace (cf. *SC*, 102c).

The encounter with Jesus, who died and rose again for us, is the purpose that the Church always pursues, placing the celebration of the Paschal event at the centre of every moment.

Hence the Council Fathers considered "the foundation and kernel of the whole liturgical year" to be Sunday, "the original feast day" (cf. *SC*, 106). In various modern languages, its name indicates that it is the "*dies Domini*", "the Lord's day". Even in those languages where the reference to the "day of the sun" (*Sunday*, *Sonntag*) has prevailed, the link with Christ can be discerned: Christ is the true "sun of righteousness" who enlightens every person!

Saint John Paul II, in the Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini* (31 May 1998) teaches that Sunday is the day of the Lord, the day of the Church, the day of man and, finally, the "day of days". "Since Sunday is the weekly Easter, recalling and making present the day upon which Christ rose from the dead, it is also the day which reveals the meaning of time. ... Springing from the Resurrection, it cuts through human time, the months, the years, the centuries, like a directional arrow which points them towards their target: Christ's Second Coming. Sunday foreshadows the last day, the day of the *Parousia*" (75), when we shall all rise again.

To sanctify Sunday, it is fundamental to celebrate the Eucharist. Listening to the Word and partaking of the Body of Christ entail, according to the Council Fathers, the coming together *in unum* (cf. *SC*, 106), that is, the joyful gathering of the faithful. In this assembly, the Christian community makes visible its communion with the Lord and bears witness to its belonging to Christ and its fidelity to the Church. This assembly cannot be substituted by a solely virtual presence, nor can it be reduced to a merely passive gathering. The liturgical assembly is in fact fulfilled through the active participation of brothers and sisters, called together to "thank God who 'has begotten them again, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto a living hope'" (*1 Pet* 1:3) (*ibid.*).

In this regard, I urge everyone to seek the best possible conditions so that even those who are unable to take time off work on Sundays may take part in Holy Mass.

Dear friends, the liturgical year, punctuated by Sundays, has an interesting history, in which the faith and devotion of the Church are interwoven. Indeed, from as early as the second century AD, the celebration of the weekly Easter was joined by that of the annual Easter, the "most solemn festival" (*SC*, 102), extending over the most joyful period of fifty days, culminating in Pentecost, and prepared for by the season of Lent with its penitential character (cf. *SC*, 109). The development of the Christmas cycle, which took place later and was modelled on the Paschal cycle, has made it possible to relive the mysteries of the Incarnation of the Word of God, of His birth and of His manifestation to the world. The Church then incorporated into the various times the veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, "joined by an inseparable bond to the saving work of her Son" (*SC*, 103), and "the memory of the martyrs and the other saints" who "sing God's perfect praise in heaven and offer prayers for us" (*SC*, 104).

The liturgical year thus repeats, in sacramental form, the teaching of the history of salvation, guiding the faithful from the expectation of the Messiah to the fullness of the Paschal Mystery and to the anticipation of future glory. In it, the Church celebrates the salvific relevance of the mystery of Christ, enabling believers to participate in it ever more deeply. For this reason, the liturgical year constitutes the guiding principle and the essential framework for all pastoral action.

Special greetings:

I greet all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, particularly the groups from Malta and Zimbabwe. Upon you and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you all!

Summary of Catechesis:

Dear brothers and sisters, in our continuing series of catecheses on the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, we reflect today on the liturgical year and its relevance for the faithful. The liturgical year is not a static representation of past events, but an encounter with Christ himself, who desires to immerse his people in the mysteries of the history of salvation. The day on which Christ rose from the dead is the core of the liturgical year, and foreshadows Christ's second coming, when we will all rise again. For this reason, it is essential for the faithful to sanctify the Lord's Day by gathering to celebrate the Eucharist. May our active participation and steadfast witness help us to enter ever more deeply into the reality of belonging to Christ, and may we anticipate with hope his coming in glory.

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LEO XIV

GENERAL AUDIENCE

St Peter's Basilica
Wednesday, 19 August 2026
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Catechesis. The Documents of the Second Vatican Council. III. Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium. 7. *Sacred Music*

Dear brothers and sisters,

The sixth chapter of the Second Vatican Council's Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC) is dedicated to sacred music. The document states that: "The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as sacred song united to the words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy" (*SC*,, 112). It specifies that "sacred music is to be considered the more holy in proportion as it is more closely connected with the liturgical action, whether it adds delight to prayer, fosters unity of minds, or confers greater solemnity upon the sacred rites. But the Church approves of all forms of true art having the needed qualities, and admits them into divine worship" (*ibid.*).

Here we find the core of the Council''s teaching, which confirms and deepens the ministerial function of music in the liturgy, already highlighted by Saint Pius X in the Motu Proprio *Inter Sollicitudines* (22 November 1903). Indeed, music is part of the liturgical action and is not merely a decorative part of the celebration. To sing and play music during the liturgy is to pray, attuning one's heart to that of our sisters and brothers and to God, through active participation in the mystery being celebrated. In particular, music expresses the affective dimension of prayer, as Saint Augustine says: "*Cantare amantis est*", that is, "singing belongs to those who love" (*Sermon* 336, 1). This is very important, because it helps us open our hearts to God's action in grace and allow ourselves to be moulded by it.

Singing also fosters *communion*. It contributes to the unity of hearts, overcoming differences between people and bringing everyone together in praise of God through the symphony of voices. Thus, it becomes an epiphany of the Church, a tangible manifestatior of the communion that belongs to her very nature.

The profound theological value of sacred hymns as an integral part of liturgical action carries certain requirements. The first is that, at every level, it must respond to what is most appropriate for the liturgical moment, beyond fashions or composers' particular sensitivities. Its form, especially in its melodic aspect, must be at once noble and simple, of high musical quality and easily performable, particularly when it is intended to be sung by the whole assembly (cf. *SC*,, 121).

For the same reason, the Council also recommends that the texts be suitable, profound and at the same time readily understandable, inspired mainly by Sacred Scripture, liturgical books and the spiritual Tradition of the Church. Attention must be paid to this, so that the dynamic expressed in the ancient principle *lex orandi, lex credendi*, that is, the law of prayer is also the law of faith, may remain alive and continue to grow.

Sacrosanctum Concilium devotes considerable attention to the theme of the active participation of the faithful (cf. n. 114). This "must be understood [...] on the basis of a greater awareness of the mystery being celebrated and its relationship to daily life" (Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*, 52), in a "spirit of constant conversion which must mark the lives of all the faithful" (*ibid.*, 55). As for the practical way in which this can be achieved through sacred music's specific role, the Constitution offers a clear answer: "the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and songs", and "reverent silence" should be fostered (*SC*,, 30). It urges each person, minister or member of the faithful, to perform "all of, but only, those parts which pertain to his office by the nature of the rite and the principles of liturgy" (*SC*, 28), in a harmonious balance between different ministries, various interventions and moments of silence.

The Council attributes great value to Gregorian chant, without excluding other genres of sacred music from the celebration. Particular attention is also given to the organ (cf. *SC*,, 120), while the use of other instruments is permitted "on condition that the instruments are suitable, or can be made suitable, for sacred use, accord with the dignity of the temple, and truly contribute to the edification of the faithful" (*SC*,, 120).

A theme close to the Council's reform is that of *inculturation*, including in the field of sacred music. In particular, with regard to the musical traditions of different cultures, the Council emphasizes the importance of taking them into consideration seriously, as they form part of people's religious and social life. Thus, on one hand, an "attitude toward religion" should be promoted in everyone (*SC*,, 119). On the other, "every effort should be made to see that they become competent in promoting the traditional music of these peoples, both in schools and in sacred services" (*ibid.*).

A particular role in the liturgical context is given to the *schola cantorum*. The Council recommends the promotion of this pastoral instrument, to ensure the "proper performance of the parts which belong to it, according to the different kinds of music sung, and to encourage the active participation of the faithful in the singing" (Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction *Musicam Sacram*, 19).

Hence, composers of sacred music are called to know and preserve the musical heritage of the Church, allowing it to inspire new compositions at the service of the liturgy, while respecting contemporary sensibilities and the different cultural traditions, so as to "'purify worship from ugliness of style, from distasteful forms of expression, from uninspired musical texts which are not worthy of the great act that is being celebrated', to guarantee dignity and excellence to liturgical compositions" (Saint John Paul II, *Chirograph on Sacred Music*, 22 November 2003, 3).

For all these reasons, the Council Fathers recommended promoting the formation and practice of sacred music "in seminaries, in the novitiates and houses of study of religious of both sexes, and also in other Catholic institutions and schools" (*SC*,, 115), and ensuring that musicians and singers receive sound liturgical formation (cf. *ibid.*).

Dear brothers and sisters, the Fathers of the Church held liturgical singing in great esteem as a symbol of ecclesial communion. We can therefore conclude with Saint Ignatius of Antioch's beautiful words: "Let each of you unite to become a choir, so that, harmonious in love and taking up the song of God in unison, you may with one voice sing to the Father through Jesus Christ, so that he may hear you and recognize, from the good works you perform, that you are members of his Son" (cf. *Letter to the Ephesians*, 4, 2).

Special greetings:

I extend a warm welcome to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially those from Malta. Upon you and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you all!

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear brothers and sisters, in our continuing catechesis on the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, today we consider the importance of sacred music. Indeed, singing and playing a musical instrument are acts of prayer. Music thus fosters our unity in praising God and opens our hearts to be fashioned by his grace. Far from being merely decorative, therefore, sacred music is a treasure of profound value. It should always be dignified, draw inspiration from Sacred Scripture and reflect the grandeur of the mystery celebrated. Sacred music is also to reflect local cultures, expressing the authentic traditions of peoples, while promoting the universal Church's musical heritage. The Council also emphasized the need for solid liturgical formation and education in sacred music. Dear brothers and sisters, in the liturgy, may we join together in love, and – in the words of Saint Ignatius of Antioch – "with one voice sing to the Father through Jesus Christ."

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LEO XIV

GENERAL AUDIENCE

St Peter's Basilica
Wednesday, 26 August 2026
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Catechesis. The Documents of the Second Vatican Council. III. Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium. 8. *The motivations of the liturgical reform*

Dear brothers and sisters,

In this final catechesis on the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, today I would like to look at the reasons why the Council Fathers sought to promote a reform of the liturgy. In this regard, the third Letter from the Council, which Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, then Archbishop of Milan, sent on 28 October 1962 to the faithful of his Church, is particularly enlightening. The liturgy, he wrote, "is a sincere expression of both the divine and the human. It is language. On the one hand, it is a vehicle for divine teaching; on the other, it is a voice in dialogue with God. It is clear that it cannot renounce its didactic function, nor can it fail to offer faith and piety the opportunity to be expressed with spontaneous intelligibility". [1] Motivated by these convictions, the future Pope Saint Paul VI affirmed that the faithful "cannot and must no longer remain silent and passive. Their physical presence cannot be reconciled with their spiritual absence". [2]

The similarity between these statements and those which would appear in no. 48 of the Conciliar Constitution is evident: “The Church … earnestly desires that Christ’s faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. They should be instructed by God’s word and be nourished at the table of the Lord’s body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn also to offer themselves; through Christ the Mediator they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all”. These words express a renewed awareness of the value of the liturgy. Through the Church’s ritua actions, while the memorial of the work of salvation is celebrated, the opportunity is provided to experience a true relationship with God, coming into contact with the salvific event. Since the gestures and the words of the sacred liturgy are critical to realizing this experience, the participation of the faithful cannot be passive.

By placing what constitutes the heart of the ecclesial experience at the centre, the Conciliar reform was intended to allow the liturgy to shine forth as “the primary source of that divine exchange in which the life of God is communicated to us” [3]. From this conviction, the need arose to make the richness of biblical texts and prayers more accessible to all the faithful, and to streamline the order of the celebration compared with what had been set out in the liturgical books in use at the time.

Indeed, since the liturgy is a living entity, it has always been subjected to developments and changes throughout the centuries. The Magisterium adapted its forms to the needs of different eras. It is therefore not surprising that the Second Vatican Council too, with the utmost respect for the heritage of tradition, and precisely in order to make it more accessible, considered it necessary to revise the liturgical books.

The aim that the Fathers had in mind is explained in no. 21 of the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: "In order that the Christian people may more certainly derive an abundance of graces from the sacred liturgy, holy Mother Church desires to undertake with great care a general restoration of the liturgy itself. For the liturgy is made up of immutable elements divinely instituted, and of elements subject to change. These not only may but ought to be changed with the passage of time if they have suffered from the intrusion of anything out of harmony with the inner nature of the liturgy or have become unsuited to it. In this restoration, both texts and rites should be drawn up so that they express more clearly the holy things which they signify; the Christian people, so far as possible, should be enabled to understand them with ease and to take part in them fully, actively, and as befits a community". The distinction, within the liturgy, between divine, immutable elements, and human elements, which instead "admit of various modifications, as the needs of the age, circumstance and the good of souls may require, and as the ecclesiastical hierarchy, under guidance of the Holy Spirit, may have authorized", dates back to Pope Pius XII's Encyclical *Mediator Dei* (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 39, 1947, 541–542).

Moreover, the desire for a "general reform" did not come about suddenly, but had been evident in the actions of successive Popes since the beginning of the 20th century, in keeping with the demands of the Liturgical Movement. The assertion that the faithful should not attend celebrations "as strangers or silent spectators" had already been raised in Pope Pius XI's Apostolic Constitution *Divini Cultus* . Furthermore, one may recall Pope Pius XII's interventions regarding the ordering of the rites of Holy Week, which he rescheduled to the hours corresponding to the events of Easter, after they had for centuries been brought forward to the morning hours. Nor should it be forgotten that Saint John XXIII regarded it necessary to simplify the rubrics of the Breviary and the Missal, approving this with the Motu proprio *Rubricarum instructum* of 25 July 1960, in which he referred the proposal of fundamental principles for a reform of the liturgy at the forthcoming Ecumenical Council.

The liturgical reform promoted by the Second Vatican Council is thus firmly rooted in the living tradition of the Church. A correct understanding of it also enables us to reject the abuses that occurred in certain sectors of the Church during the post-Conciliar period, and which, unfortunately, still occur from time to time today, where some of the principles underlying the reform itself have been taken to extremes or misunderstood.

In this regard, it is worth recalling that the Conciliar Constitution affirms that “Liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations of the Church, which is the ‘sacrament of unity’, namely, the holy people united and ordered under their bishops. Therefore liturgical services pertain to the whole body of the Church; they manifest it and have effects upon it” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 26).

It is therefore the primary responsibility of pastors, of bishops, but also of each individual priest, to safeguard and promote a liturgy which, while respecting liturgical norms, shines with noble simplicity (cf. no. 34) and thus manifests the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Such a liturgy will also be a fundamental vehicle for evangelization, the instrument of grace through which, as the Council teaches, we may learn to offer ourselves and, through Christ’s mediation, be perfected in unity with God and amongst ourselves (cf. no. 48).

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[1] G. B. Montini, «Third Letter from the Council», *Rivista Diocesana Milanese* 51 (1962) 921-923: 922.

[2] *Ibid*.

[3] Solemn Closing of the Second Session of the Council, *Allocution of the Holy Father Paul VI* (4 December 1963).

Special greetings:

I greet all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, particularly the groups from Malta, Senegal and Canada. A special greeting to those serving in the National Offices of the Pontifical Mission Societies. Upon you and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you all!

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear brothers and sisters, in this final catechesis on the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, we recall the reasons the Council Fathers promoted a liturgical reform. When the Church carries out a reform of the liturgy — a constant process of development across the centuries — there is an important distinction to be made between the divine, immutable elements, and the human elements, which may undergo various modifications. The need arose for the faithful to celebrate the liturgies more consciously and actively, not "as strangers and silent spectators," but participating fully in the salvific mystery. In this way, the Christian people learn to recognize sacred realities, offer themselves with and through the hands of the priest, and become more open to receiving God's grace. At every celebration of the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, let us ask for God's help to be strengthened on our journey and tc enter into a deeper relationship with the Lord.

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