

## ON THE REVIVAL OF THE TRIDENTINE MASS

[This article reflects my personal opinion - it is the result of prayer, study, logic/faith considerations and needs to be understood as such. It is the decision of the Holy Father to implement the wider use of this format of the Mass. While submitting to his authority and decision to do so - I do not agree with his decision. I ask that you read the entire article before making any preliminary judgments on it.]

There is no *convincing reason* to unearth a former liturgical expression of the Mass in the Roman Rite of the Catholic Church for wide usage. Conciliation is not a convincing enough reason. Catechesis is the antidote. There is no such thing as benign coexistence in this matter – between the ordinary and the extraordinary. The best of the old – all of the old - is already preserved and enhanced in the format of the new. Emotion is strongly and stubbornly clouding reason in this very important area of Catholic life.

Throughout the history of the development of the Liturgy of the Eucharist in the Roman Rite there was a flow and a progression that changed, positively at appropriate times, and for logical and spiritually valid reasons.

If there was no Protestant Revolt in the 16th century, the evolution of the external manifestation of the Rite would, by this day in age, have progressed into a rite in which there was full, active and enthusiastic participation, in the language of the people, which would demonstrate both the unity of the rite in form, but a multi-cultural expression as far as incidentals go.

Then came the fateful Protestant Revolt, which, unfortunate enough though it was, and as valid as it was, in part, it caused an overly emotional and knee-jerk response called the Counter Reformation – which while well-intentioned and beneficial in some ways – did more damage than it ever intended in others.

The most damaging result of the counter-reformation was the irrational “fear of Protestantism.” This produced a barrage of overly

rigid and suffocatingly binding legislation in church government that all but choked the life of the Holy Spirit out of the Church – and thus, the Church itself.

One such unfortunate, overly zealous reaction to the idea of Protestantism was the “freezing-both-now-and-forever” of the external formulation of the celebration of the Roman Rite Liturgy of the Eucharist (as well as all of the other sacraments). The “let’s-nail-everything-down-and-shut-forever” mentality was actually the worse thing that could ever have happened at that or any other time. Such a reaction is never a rational response to anything.

And so, for 400 years nothing – at all – did change. Nothing! Until the stifled and last gasping Spirit of the Church – by means of the Second Vatican Council – “opened up all of the windows” – and proclaimed a new springtime in the Church. It was time now for the Spirit to lead the Church into a present day experience of where the Church ought to be. Thankfully part of that work was the “unfreezing” of liturgical rigidity, with the aim of bringing the quality and form of celebration to the point at which it might have been, by this time, in the first place, had the Protestant Revolution never happened.

With all that said: I find it difficult to understand why our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI would endorse and allow the unearthing of this more than outdated form of liturgical expression (The Tridentine Mass) at this particular stage of the Church’s growth and development. In my opinion it is a very puzzling action! Conciliation and compromise, in this regard, can only do more harm than good.

The glory of the post Vatican II Mass is its INTELLEGIBILITY in mind, its INVITATION TO FULL AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION with mind and body, and its facilitation of UNITY in mind, heart and form, while allowing for diversity in expression. These three elements: intelligibility, full participation and increased sense of unity make for the case of accepting the Ordinary Rite of the Latin Rite, as the ONLY Rite of the Latin Rite.

The Tridentine Mass glories in UNintelligibility (the dead Latin language), no real active participation at all (everything is done for the people by the priest and the servers and the choir), and thereby a

very real and disturbing break with the rest of the Roman Rite as far as worship and spirituality goes. It would seem that if it is Jesus intent to make the practice of worship meaningful, intelligible, something that we actually do, which causes unity with each other and with him: the resurrection of the Tridentine Mass is not the way to promote what Jesus intended.

It is my hunch that what those “craving the old mass” are looking for is the propriety, dignity, sacredness and beauty that seems to have been lost in the last 40 years. These exact qualities can be applied to and found in the “new liturgy” and it can be, in my estimation, even more significant and powerful than any Tridentine Mass ever was, is or will be. For the bottom line here is EXPERIENCE WITH THE PRESENT RISEN JESUS in Word, Sacrament and in our brothers and sisters gathered around the altar with us – and with whom we live, work and go to school.

It is then that, our hearts full of love, we can go out and live our day, our week, loving and serving him who touches our lives so deeply at each and every moment! If what we experience at Mass does not lead to works of charity – at all times – in all places - then we are not participating in it as intended – no matter what kind of Mass we attend. In my opinion, we have a better chance and are in a better frame of mind to go out and do this if we come from a Mass format that is current, vibrant and Spirit-filled.

Catechesis is the antidote. In fact lack of catechesis is mainly to blame for this reactionary state of affairs in the first place. When the Second Vatican Council was concluded in 1965, what should have happened was a temporary “moratorium” on all aspects of the Church until a very thorough, well thought out, systematic, consistent and plainly understood explanation of what happened at the council, what the council recommended, why it recommended it, what the changes mean, how they are to be implemented as part of the entire picture of Church life were set forth for all to consider.

The updating and revisions of all of the Sacraments including the Eucharist should have been extremely well publicized and formulated into easy to understand instructions and manuals for the person in

the pew – who is the Church! Simply saying: “This is the way it’s going to be done from now on” was no way to go about it.

Proper catechesis was not done, then – 40 years ago. At that time there was an explosion of half-baked, half-understood and half-properly-implemented information across the board. The chaos of the Church of the 70’s and 80’s and even the 90’s was the result. Evidently, half-baked was not the proper word to use in some cases.

But it is never too late to do what should have been done 40 years ago – because now, we not only have a much clearer understanding of what Vatican II was actually all about – but we have 40 years of Post-Vatican II growth and development into the depths of the mysteries of our faith – and its manifold expressions.

What is needed now in the regard of liturgical stability is to recatechize the entire Church everywhere as to the proper, dignified, sacred and beautiful way in which the revised liturgy that we already have, should and could be celebrated – how it fits into the entire picture of what the Church actually looks like in our day - and how it is linked directly with what is supposed to go on after the liturgy when we leave the building: to “love and serve him” in all our brothers and sisters with whom we have just had a very positive and meaningful experience. This idea was far from what the pre-Vatican II liturgy impelled us to do. In those days – after our private duty-time with God, we quietly went out and resumed a secular life that had little to do with what just happened in the incense filled building which we had just left.

Faith, Liturgy, Works of Charity comprises the whole picture! WE are the people of God together! WE sing together! WE listen to God’s Word together! WE profess our faith together! WE pray to Our Father together! WE affirm the presence of the Crucified, Risen and Coming Again Christ together! WE commune not only with Jesus but with one another - together! WE go out to “love and serve God as we love and serve each other” – in a togetherness that must carry into our secular lives!

This is the total picture! This is the current picture in our day in age of the Church alive! This is the picture from which we measure where all

of us are at – or need to be! The Tridentine Mass was but a temporary stage of the growth and development of the Roman Rite – which due to circumstances that were blown out of proportion – survived much longer than it would ever have survived if there was no extenuating circumstance of the Protestant Revolution. To endorse and allow this archaic museum-piece seems counterproductive to me – and a source of disunity most of all – in the One Church of Christ!

(Having said this: the only thing that I can conclude is that the Holy Father has a really good reason for doing what he did - but I can't for the life of me think of what it could be!)

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September 17, 2007  
Feast of St. Robert Bellarmine

Addendum:

Further thought on this matter brings to mind some other supporting ideas:

While I am in favor of a certain attempt to “relatinize” the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church, there is a very fine line between the positive and the negative in this regard. The occasional and optional interlacing of Latin Liturgical Music, for example, in a parish setting seems well intended, and can do much to the beauty and sacredness of the liturgical actions. Overuse, it seems to me, could only invite witting or unwitting misuse - and lead to overriding the more contemporary with the ancient. We are of ancient roots, but we are also firmly implanted in our own day in age, and the same Holy Spirit , who produced the music of long ago, is till producing quite acceptable, noble and effective music that give God as much glory today, as the compositions of the past.

The musical environment (as well as the use of Latin Prayers, and ancient formats) - if not managed with great care - can influence the emotional life of the average parishioner in such a way that the distance between him/her self and God will once again become greater and wider. The majesty and awesomeness and unintelligibility of a fully “Latinized” setting can once again make men, women and children feel so small, so unworthy, so sinful, so disconnected, so full

of guilt and remorse, that the only way to deal with it, is to, once again, attend services out of the fear of hell, and to accept anything that it has to offer, whether they can relate to it or understand it or not.

This mentality, certainly, will lead, once again, to the very infrequent reception of Holy Communion. Fire and brimstone will have returned and Jesus, the leering and bookkeeping Judge would not be the companion of choice along the way of life for most Catholics.

Another thought is this: an intensely relatinized Church would cast the clergy right back on top of the pedestal. Since he is the only one with the seemingly (to many) “magical” powers (as they were considered by a lot of Catholics before the Second Vatican Council) of the “private Canon of the Mass” (especially since it was canted in a strange and unintelligible language) - the entire idea of “vine and branches,” “communal celebration around the ‘table of the Lord’,” and “Christ the Shepherd in the midst of his flock” would be suppressed while at the liturgical event.

I, for one am not in favor of any of these negative and regressionary possibilities. I may be way off target here. But again, maybe not!

We are all called to be saints. The saints had particular devotion to the Holy Mass - and the great variety of written prayers. For a great many centuries - in light of what I have said above - it seems to me that the depths of sanctity not only might have been achieved more easily, but also by a great many more individuals - if the Mass and the available “official prayers” and “liturgical music” was in the vernacular language. It seems that one of the greatest obstacles facing those called to sanctity is the intelligibility of the words on which they are pondering and meditating!

On the day of Pentecost, did not the groups of people from different parts of the world, each hear the Apostles *in their own language*. They were proclaiming and hearing one message, about one God, and one Good News - and the immanent structuring of the Church was at hand by the working of the Holy Spirit. I would think the idea here would be diversity coalescing always around one unity - conducted in a manner that is rich, noble, true and intelligible!

My bottom line is this: if excessive relatinization is the way to go, then why republish the vernacular translations of everything that will be happening? [I am sure that such publishing is happening even as we speak.] Isn't it much more logical to hear *the absolutely vital information that we need for our eternal* salvation in our own language - so that we can understand it, pray on it, mediate on it, and translate it into loving service - communicate it to all others -which is our baptismal responsibility.

The “new rite” and “new thinking and theologizing” more clearly and understandably demonstrates what is actually happening in our worship. It is a rite that faithfully adheres to the best of the essential elements of what happened not only in the first years and centuries of the Church, but as the Holy Spirit guided the reformulation along the way in a positive, cohesive and unifying way!

My point is that the Council of Trent was both an actionary and a reactionary council. Changes and reforms in Church life, across the board, we definitely needed, but to insist that those things that are meant to continue to evolve in their free-flowing, Spirit-led way, be not allowed to do so - was wrong. The Second Vatican Council was long overdue!

Addendum completed:  
November 10, 2007  
Feast of St. Leo the Great