

WHY THE LATIN MASS – PART I

As many of you know, we here at Good Shepherd Parish have the Extraordinary Rite of the Mass, more commonly called the Traditional Latin Mass, every last Sunday of the month. We have had it for close to three years now. This Mass is offered every week at a few other parishes in the Archdiocese. So I thought it was time to take a look at the Latin Mass in order to help explain it more deeply so that we may have a better understanding of it.

There have been times I have been asked: Why the *Latin* Mass? The inquisitor usually scratches his face as he pronounces the word “*Latin*” suggesting a mild contempt for anyone who finds value in the venerable language and rite. Still others become openly hostile as the mere mention of “The Latin Mass.” How can a dead language and an unused rite cause such strong reactions? I wonder. Now let’s delve into the question, why the Latin Mass?

In truth, two questions are posed. First, why Latin? Second, why the Mass? I intend to concentrate on the reasons and value of using the traditional rite, so I will only briefly touch on the second questions.

So, are there Catholics, lay or religious, opposed to the Mass? Is there latent opposition or even open hostility to the practice of traditional Catholicism? While most casual observers would answer in the negative, what is the reality?

When I was brought up, my parents always used the expression “sacrifice of the Mass.” You don’t hear that much today. In our laziness, vocally and intellectually, we have shortened it to “Mass.” And in that abbreviation tremendous meaning was lost.

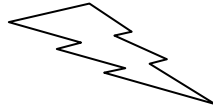
Who or what caused this loss is for another article, but the loss is manifest. We tended to learn our Faith through a kind of osmosis by attending the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Even though the word “sacrifice” is used in the New Mass and a better translation was given us last Advent in the new Roman Missal, still the sacrifice is less visible in the “new Mass.” Tables have replaced altars. We are left with a communal meal commemorating His death. Gone, or nearly so, is the representation of His atoning sacrifice in the unbloody manner of bread and wine transubstantiated into His Body and Blood. Obscured is the priest acting *In Personal Christi*, bringing the Real Presence of the Lord into our presence so that He may bring us into Communion with His Mystical Body. It is this lack of the sacred and the sacrificial nature of the Mass that traditionalists most want to restore.

And yes, there appears to be an assault against this very aspect of Catholic worship. In fact, what is so goading to the modernists who insist upon the new rite exclusively is how anyone can still want sacrifice as part of their religious ethic and practice. But, will they do away with Our Lord’s work of redemption? Are we not called to unite ourselves with His Mystical Body and, through His power and grace, carry our crosses and die to self?

Truly the fundamentals of the sacrifice of the Mass have been muted and nearly destroyed by the proponents of the “new Mass.” We were using an improper translation of the vernacular until the Vatican got involved with the new translation of the Roman Missal. Language is very important; proper word usage is very important. When someone asks, “Why the Latin Mass,” they are asking a loaded question, which, unless disarmed, becomes an obstacle to their understanding. The question when properly constructed would read: Why this certain rite of the sacrifice of the Mass over another? To which the answer is clear: It better depicts, re-creates, re-presents and confects the sacrifice of our Lord and develops an atmosphere conducive to the meditation of this great mystery by the congregation in attendance.

Once this assertion is made, the question simply becomes one of how: How does the “Latin Mass” foster a greater understanding and appreciation of (as well as communion with) the Sacrifice of Our Lord? The answer to that questions will comprise the balance of this article and hopefully demonstrate the value of restoring the Latin Mass.

Next week we will delve into defining the terms. What is meant by “Latin Mass?” What is the form and substance? Thanks and God bless you.



THE TRADITIONAL LATIN MASS

WHY USE THE 1962 MISSAL?

Is this the same as the Tridentine Mass? The 1962 Missal is sometimes called the traditional Latin Mass because the traditional Missal in use before Vatican II was originally promulgated after the 16th century Council of Trent by Pope St. Pius V. “Tridentine” comes from the word “tridentum” which is the Latin for Trent. The problem with the term *Tridentine Mass* is that it implies that this Mass was constructed by Committee after the Council of Trent, and was then imposed on the Church of those days from above. This is not what happened. The Commission of Pope St. Pius V codified and clarified the Missal thus restoring the Catholic Mass to its original purity and relative simplicity. As the Encyclical of Pope St. Pius V, *Quo Primum*, puts it, “the Mass was restored in accordance with the norms of the Fathers.”

Pope Benedict XVI identifies the organic development of the traditional Mass from the 6th century reform of Pope St. Gregory the Great. In fact, there was nothing new in the 1570 Missal of Pius V as he merely codified the Mass of the Ages in the face of the encroaching novelties of the Protestant Reformers.

Summorum Pontificam also mentions the various minor revisions of the Missal of St. Pius V through the centuries that usually correct printers errors and also add new feasts and so on. He mentions the minor revisions of Pope Urban VIII, St. Pius X, Benedict XV and Blessed John XXIII. But it is well to remember that each of these revisions was published along with the original decree of St. Pius V, *Quo Primum*, to confirm, in fact, that they did NOT change the Mass, which is why Pope Benedict XVI can speak of the Roman Missal promulgated by St. Pius V and reissued by John XXIII in 1962 and never abrogated.

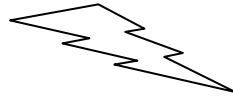
So the 1962 Missal was chosen as the Extraordinary form of the Latin Rite simply as the last edition of the Roman Missal promulgated before Vatican II.

The first thing most Catholics unacquainted with the traditional Mass want to know is: Why is it celebrated in Latin?

Briefly, the Catholic Church began in the days of the Roman Empire and the language spoken throughout that empire was latin. St. Peter himself moved the seat of Church government from Antioch to Rome, and the center of the Church’s government remains there till this day. So it’s only natural that latin would become the language of the Church. As the centuries went by latin remained the language of educated people even into the 18th and 19th century. Therefore it is not at all surprising that latin should still be the language of the Roman Catholic Church. It simply always has been.

Besides being a sign of historical continuity the latin language is also a sign of universality. No one insisted more strongly on this point than Pope John Blessed XXIII, who made his own the words of Pope Pius IX, “a universal Church must have a universal language.” A universal language greatly facilitates the unity of the Church. Ecumenical Councils, for example, were always held in latin enabling bishops from all over the world to communicate with each other. Unlike English, German, French and other vernacular languages of the western world, latin does not change over the centuries. It is not affected by colloquialism, slang and so forth. Therefore latin is the language of the traditional Mass because it preserves the original purity of the Liturgy. Even the official version of the New Mass is latin, even though it is said in the language of the people.

More next week. God bless you.



Cont'd from last week

Since the advent of modern printing Catholics have had available a side-by-side translation of the Mass in latin and the vernacular in their hand missals. So there were able to follow and understand everything the priest says and does at the altar, even when the Mass was exclusively in latin.

It should also be born in mind that at the celebrations of the traditional Latin Mass the priest usually reads the Epistle and Gospel in the vernacular from the pulpit just as his sermon and the parish announcements are read in English. Also, the prayers after Low Mass, are recited by the priest and people together and are always in the language of the congregation. Finally, it's not strictly necessary to understand the prayers of the priest at Mass as many of them are said in a low voice anyway, because the words of the priest are not addressed to the people but to God! Nor is the Mass a dialogue between the priest and the people, but a dialogue between God and His people!

WHY DOES THE PRIEST SAY THE TRADITIONAL LATIN MASS WITH HIS BACK TO THE PEOPLE?

In the old days most Catholic altars were erected so that the priest and the people were both facing *ad orientem*, or toward the east. The east is symbolic of God because it is the source of light, just as God is the source of Life and all good things. So the priest, it should be said, doesn't turn his back on the people, rather he faces the altar in the same direction as the people. This was the constant tradition of the Church and technically it still is! If you carefully examine the rubrics of the Mass of Paul VI you'll discover interesting facts. If you look at the word "Behold Brethren" and "Lamb of God" in an Altar Missal you will see the priest is directed to turn toward the people. The New Missal actually assumes that the priest is facing the altar at the Offertory and the Canon. It would have to wait for the Liturgists and local Bishop's Conferences to promote and enforce the idea that the New Mass had to be celebrated facing the people. In so doing, the continuing practice of the centuries long liturgical practice of the Church as practically cast aside and created the appearance that the Mass is primarily OUR banquet shared on a table as opposed to Christ's Sacrifice offered on an Altar.

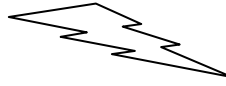
To repeat, the meaning of the Mass has not changed according to the Holy Father and according to the Tradition of the Church, the Mass is primarily a Sacrifice. In common language we talk about sacrificing for the sake of another. For example, a mother sacrifices herself for her children. A soldier sacrifices himself for his country. In each case something valuable, such as time and comfort and even life itself, is given up for the sake of another. To offer sacrifice to God means to offer Him a visible gift, whole and entire.

For a Sacrifice three things are required:

- 1) A visible gift or victim
- 2) A priest who offers it to God
- 3) An altar on which it is offered.

The perfect Sacrifice of all time is the Sacrifice of the Cross in which Jesus Christ, the Son of God, offered Himself to His Heavenly Father for the sins of the whole world. He was the Victim. He was also the Priest Who offered it and His Cross was the Altar. In the Sacrifice of the Cross, Jesus Christ offered Himself in a bloody manner. In the Sacrifice of the Mass He offers Himself in an unbloody manner. Jesus instituted the Sacrifice of the Mass at the Last Supper in the presence of His twelve Apostles. He made the Sacrifice of the Mass identical with the Sacrifice of the Cross when He gave His Body and Blood to the Apostles under the appearances of bread and wine.

final part next week.



CONCLUSION OF THE LATIN MASS

In the years following Vatican II and the Introduction to the New Liturgy, Mass attendance declined in the United States by about 60%. Catholic school enrollment declined by 55 %, teachings Sisters by 94% and seminarians by 66%. Ordinations are down by 72% and seminary enrollment by 90%. In Europe, the former Christendom, the numbers are even worse. Weekly Mass attendance in Italy and France is around 6-7%. The Netherlands, a Catholic nation who sent priests to many countries, has lost the Faith. This is a tragedy. But at the same time, while Mass attendance dwindled and liturgical novelties multiplied, there was an ever growing number of Catholics who were rediscovering and faithfully adhering to the Faith of our Fathers. According to Pope Benedict Emeritus in *Summorum Pontificam*, many people who were faithful to the Pope and Bishops nonetheless also desired to recover the form of the Sacred Liturgy that was due to them.

This occurred above all because in many places celebrations were not faithful to the prescriptions of the New Missal. I speak from experience as I lived through that period of novelties and experiments in the Liturgy, which at the time seemed to be everywhere. There was much confusion and I have seen how arbitrary deformations of the Liturgy cause deep pain to individuals totally rooted in the Faith of the Church.

It was indeed those totally rooted in their faith who felt the sting of liturgical chaos the most and sought out the traditional Latin Mass under the most trying circumstances. Sometimes they drove long distances or endured other hardships just to assist at the same Mass that formed their faith. Well, that faith is being rewarded. Even before the promulgation of *Summorum Pontificam* there were already traditional Masses being celebrated in union with the local Ordinary in 66% of U.S. Dioceses.

In the midst of a Church-wide crisis of vocations, vocations among approved communities offering the traditional Latin Mass are abundant. The Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter currently has 260 priests and 100 seminarians. The number of priests not ordained in FSSP, but have joined them since the year 2000, represent an increase of one new priest every three weeks for the last nine years. Likewise, the Institute of Christ the King can boast of Houses of formation in ten countries with 50 priests and 60 seminarians, all in fifteen years. There are other Religious Orders benefitting as well. The Franciscans of the Immaculate now celebrate the traditional Latin Mass weekly and all of the Sacraments are celebrated in the Old Rite. Then there is the beautiful Order of St. John Cantius in Chicago which has a daily traditional Mass and an overflowing of vocations.

With the publishing of *Summorum Pontificam* we look forward to many more celebrations of the traditional Latin Mass and a continuing restoration of the practice of our holy Faith expressly when more priests investigate the 1962 Missal and experience the beauty and solemnity of the traditional Divine Office.

Finally, Catholics who assist at the traditional Latin Mass are not simply old-fashioned and merely prefer the atmosphere of the old Liturgy to that of the more casual and easy going New Masses which have become the norm today. It is one thing: they love the Faith! They seek to pass it on to the next generation. These faithful include young families with many children, college students and young professionals. They have chosen to attend what Pope Benedict Emeritus calls the Extraordinary Form of the Latin Rite, not out of nostalgia or stubbornness or disobedience. On the contrary, they take seriously the obligation to be obedient to the infallible teachings of the Church. They love and assist at the traditional Latin Mass because it IS EXTRAORDINARY! God bless you.