

PART I: UNITY MATTERS

Introduction:

When Jesus' first disciples were signing on, "Philip found Nathaniel and said 'we have found the one Moses wrote about... Jesus from Nazareth'. Faced with Nathaniel's scepticism, Philip simply said 'come and see' (John 1:43-46). And that did it.

If this same Jesus is now "Christ among you, ..." (Col.1:27), then people's experience of Christian lives, Christian community and Christian worship should have the same effect. And it does, as many have testified. But it doesn't when we obscure his presence, even just by carelessness.

In fact, whether people would even recognise him as the one sent by the Father depends on us: "Father... may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me" (Jn 17:21).

Unity matters that much. And that is what we put in jeopardy by disunity. That is also why Pope Francis' Decree Traditionis Custodes matters so much.

I can understand why some would ask: why would Pope Francis withdraw permission to use the 1962 Missal which means so much to a small community of devout people who are not seeking disunity...? And, why can't the Traditional Latin Mass (TLM) and the revised Missal (Novus Ordo) simply co-exist in the same way that the Church allows various rites to co-exist...?

I am sure there some adherents of the Traditional Latin Mass (TLM) who think of the TLM as a kind of harmless pluralism. Perhaps this even accounts for a go-slow response by some bishops, hoping it might not be necessary to upset people who are finding comfort in this expression of their faith. But there is an element of wishing thinking here. The situation is more serious than that, both overseas and in Aotearoa NZ.

Papal Intervention:

Pope Francis' Decree Traditionis Custodes called for an end to division within the Catholic community's worship.

When Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI allowed, under certain conditions, Mass to be celebrated according to the 1962 Missal, it was – in both cases – regarded as a concession to special needs, not a turning back from the liturgy reform. To emphasise the point, Pope Benedict even called it an extra-ordinary way of celebrating the Roman rite – not on a par with the ordinary form. The Council had serious reasons for renewing the liturgy. It would have contradicted its own intentions if it had intended the existence of a revised Missal and an unrevised Missal "in parallel," as if the renewal were merely optional.

Contrary to the explicit intentions of both these Popes, some have not wanted to accept that these provisions were special "concessions". They have treated the extraordinary form as another ordinary form of the Roman rite. Some even claim that Mass according to the 1962 Missal is the only truly Catholic form of the Mass.

Further, the 1962 Missal has become a flagship for wider dissent, including an un-Catholic disregard for the Council itself, even claiming it betrayed Tradition and the "true Church" – a Council that has

been explicitly endorsed by every Pope since. Those of us who have tried to explain the reasons for Pope Francis' Decree have been met by hard-line opposition and very dismissive attitudes, not to mention derogatory attitudes towards Pope Francis himself, and disregard for his role. In many cases, the protagonists (both lay and ordained) are taking their cue from websites emanating from the USA. Division and confusion are the hall-marks of a different spirit, not the Holy Spirit.

What eventually confronted Pope Francis was serious and increasing division. As the one whose core ministry is to preside over the unity of the Church, he could not ignore this. Nor can the college of bishops that shares responsibility with him for the universal Church. In implementing his Decree, bishops are asked "to proceed in such a way as to return to a unitary form of celebration..." A 'hands-off' attitude is not consistent with what he expects of bishops. Delay in carrying out Pope Francis' decree is not obviating division; it is entrenching it.

A Bigger Challenge:

A "bigger challenge" is the need for the wider Catholic community always to celebrate the revised liturgy in a way that allows its true merit and beauty to become evident, and to not scandalise by carelessness. This need is at the heart of Pope Francis' follow-up letter *On the Liturgical Formation of the People of God*.

It is fair to ask what is it that TLM adherents feel is missing in the revised liturgy. In his Apostolic Constitution promulgating the revised liturgy, Pope Paul VI explained how the revised Missal is the former Missal, in an enriched form. Similarly, Pope Francis: "whoever wishes to celebrate with devotion according to earlier forms of the liturgy can find in the reformed Roman Missal ... all the elements of the Roman rite...". So, is it something else that is missing?

I have listened to the concerns of TLM Catholics, and recognised their love for the Mass and deep need for reverence; their strong attachment to family values; commitment to community, and experience of belonging, and care for one another. They rightly expect reliable leadership, though perhaps are too accepting of clericalism. And they want continuity with tradition, even if not always respecting Pope John Paul II's explanation of the difference between Tradition and mere traditions.

I have also noted the aspirations of the wider Catholic community, much of it recently expressed in the synodal process. In common with TLM Catholics they want an experience of community that is real and caring. They, too, want good leadership, but of a kind that respects Pope Benedict's teaching that lay and ordained are "co-responsible for what the Church is like and what it does." They rightly want closer collaboration, and they understand the need for on-going formation. I see in the aspirations of TLM Catholics and the wider Catholic community underlying common ground, and potential for moving further towards the unity that any Pope is entitled to expect of all of us.

On-going Formation:

This brings us to the need for on-going formation. Quite apart from liturgy, there is an obligation on all Catholics to continue their formation in the faith. The *General Catechetical Directory* promulgated by Pope St John Paul II, points out that on-going catechesis is for adults even more than it is for children. Acceptance of the need for on-going formation should be common ground for all of us. It is a duty for all of us; and it is sign of good faith.

Unfortunately, many Catholics became stuck in a childhood understanding of the faith. Their strong attachment to it echoes deep appreciation of those who handed the faith down to them, and a sense of responsibility for passing it on. For this we must respect them. Anyway, opportunities for

adult learning about the faith were not usually available. Nevertheless, a childhood understanding of the faith is incomplete, and insufficient for adult Christian life.

Lack of continued learning results in falling behind. Geographical isolation over time can affect whole societies in this way. Something similar happens to religious movements that keep mainly to themselves. Examples are not hard to find. The reason why monastic communities have not been affected like this is precisely because they do not starve themselves of intellectual formation. They have often been at the forefront of the scholarship that has led to the Church's renewal.

An unintended side-effect of Pope Benedict's more extensive concessions was that TLM adherents felt no need to pursue a deeper understanding of the Council; it seemed that for them nothing had changed. Having put so much work into the Council as a theologian, and having endorsed it as Pope, it is not surprising that Pope Benedict insisted on the need for all Catholics to further their understanding of the Council.

Part II clarifies some of the areas where there is potential for misunderstandings, and superficiality.

Part II: POINTS OF CLARIFICATION

1) Wasn't the Traditional Latin Mass the "Mass of the ages"?

Yes, which is why it adapts to the different ages. We have only to read St Justin's beautiful description of the Mass dating from c. 155 AD to realise that the form of the Mass does change. The Mass St Justin knew would eventually live on in the revised Missal Pope Pius V promulgated after the Council of Trent; (the "Traditional Latin Mass"). And that Mass now lives on in the revised Missal promulgated by Pope Paul VI after the Second Vatican Council. Both Missals have resulted from revisions of previous texts. That is the sense in which we can speak of "the Mass of the ages". And that is the sense in which Tradition lives on even as small traditions come and go.

2) Was the 1962 Missal "abrogated"?

No, but that only means it was not annulled, and so it can still be validly used when the Pope authorises it to meet special needs. It was withdrawn from normal use. Pope Paul VI made it clear that the revised form of the Missal *replaced* the unrevised form.

3) Why did the Second Vatican Council require the Missal to be revised?

Historical research contributed to the reform which gave us the "Traditional Latin Mass". Likewise, the Second Vatican Council's reform had at its disposal up-dated scholarship based on ancient Christian sources even more recently discovered.

According to Pope Paul VI, the Council intended

- (i) to make it easier for people to see the meaning of the various parts of the Mass and the connection between them, and easier for people to participate;
- (ii) open up the scriptures more abundantly; and
- (iii) restore elements of the Mass which, through the accidents of history, had become obscured. (For example: reflecting the influence of Jansenism, the unrevised Missal still instructs the priest what to do *if anyone* wants to receive Holy Communion; whereas reflecting the later influence of Pope St Pius X, the revised Missal *expects that most* of the congregation will be receiving Holy Communion.)

The Council taught that “full, conscious and active participation in the liturgical celebrations is required by the *very nature* of the liturgy” (Liturgy 14)

4) Who celebrates the Mass?

Our previous formation left many of us with the impression that the priest celebrated the Mass and the rest of us “attended” Mass. People adjusted to this understanding, so that while the priest prayed the prayers of the Mass, they often filled in the time with their own prayers. The reality, however, is that Mass is celebrated by the whole congregation (cf *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1140). That is why it requires their “full, conscious and active participation”, whether by word, song, gesture, or stillness and deep silence - but acting as “one body, one spirit in Christ”. The way we participate is not determined by “personal preference,” (which is what contemporary secular culture emphasises.)

The priest’s role is still special: he does not act on Christ’s behalf because it is Christ himself who acts - through the priest who has been ordained to act in his Person. But this does not make him the only “celebrant”. According to the prayers of the Mass itself, “offerimus” i.e. “we offer”.

5) Reverence:

Reverence is body-language par excellence. It is the demeanour that comes naturally when we are aware of being in God’s presence. But there are different ways of being in God’s presence, and different expressions of reverence. For example, the reverence proper at a grave-side; the reverence proper to adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, etc. Each is important in its own circumstances.

The kind of reverence proper to liturgy corresponds to the ways Christ is really present. According to the Council (Liturgy, 7), Christ is present

- in the congregation (“where two or three are gathered...”);
- in the word (where “Christ is speaking to his people” - present tense);
- in the ministry of those ordained to act in the name of Christ;
- and especially in the Sacrament.

These four different manifestations of Christ’s real presence invite different ways of responding. *The appropriate way of responding to each is the appropriate way of being reverent.*

And so, for example: how we respond to Christ present in his word is different from how we respond to his presence in the Sacrament, and how we acknowledge His presence in the gathering. Greeting one another before Mass begins, followed by a period of silence, helps to form the community that is about to worship as one body. The way we relate to people who have “gathered in his name” is different from the ways we relate to people who have gathered for social occasions.

To require only one way of being reverent (e.g. the reverence due to the Blessed Sacrament), excluding the others, is against the nature of the liturgy.

6) Posture

In the liturgy, postures and gestures are statements of faith. They are ways of saying – with our whole self – what we believe and what we are doing. They em-body and en-act our inner dispositions, and deepen them. That is why we don’t just ‘do’ them; we need to really mean them –

make them mean what our minds and hearts want to say. They also enable the congregation to act as one body.

For example: the presence of Christ is beautifully acknowledged when the book of the Gospels, symbolising Christ, is brought into the assembly, accompanied by song (and in some cultures, dance), and the congregation rises to its feet.

The custom of kneeling during the Eucharistic Prayer is regarded as “laudable”. But it is important to understand the early Christians’ practice of standing. Eucharistic Prayer I, originating around the year 375, refers to the congregation “standing around” (“circum-stantes” - currently translated as “gathered here”). The even older Eucharistic Prayer II, originating around the year 215, refers to our being counted “worthy to stand in Your presence” (currently mistranslated as “being in Your presence”).

At Benediction, we are adoring Christ, for which the appropriate body-language is “down in adoration falling...” That is not mainly what we are doing during the Eucharistic Prayer. The Eucharistic Prayer is addressed almost entirely to the Father. The appropriate body-language is that which best corresponds with what the Eucharistic Prayer is saying. For those early Christians, standing was body-language for acknowledging that in Christ we have been raised up.

That is why St John Chrysostom forbade his people to kneel during the Easter season; so did St Augustine. The Council of Nicea forbade kneeling for prayer on Sundays; and when in the 9th century kneeling became more common, it was only on non-festive days, never on days that commemorate the resurrection of Jesus, i.e. Sundays and feast-days. Standing is still the posture in the Eastern Churches.

7) Mission:

In the celebration of Eucharist, the Holy Spirit makes present to us what God is doing for our salvation (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1091 ff). We allow ourselves to be taken up into it, with wonder and thanksgiving.

We are being sanctified and sent – two sides of the same coin. Our participation in the Mass is incomplete if it does not flow out into every aspect of life, making it more authentically human – through social and economic justice, and responsibility for the planet. “The split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age” (2nd Vat. Council Church in Modern World, 43.)

The connection between our sanctification and our mission is illustrated in our reception of Holy Communion. “We become what we receive” (St Augustine). What we receive is ‘the body broken and given up for others’ and the ‘blood (life) poured out for others’. Being “for others” is what we commit ourselves to when we respond “Amen”.

‘Meal’ and ‘sacrifice’ are not conflicting concepts: “... every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming his death” (1 Cor. 11:26). Nor are ‘altar’ and ‘table’ conflicting concepts, as the table shape of the altar is meant to remind us.

8) Hand or tongue?

During times of infection, hygiene aimed at preventing the spread of potentially fatal infections is a matter of moral duty towards ourselves and others. In normal times, our practice should be based

on Jesus' own words at the Last Supper: "take, eat... take, drink". It is based on the normal ways that adults take food and drink. But we receive it with deep awareness of who it is we are receiving. (Placing food on another's tongue is more normally what we do for infants and disabled people.)

9) Homily or sermon?

The scriptures give us a backdrop against which to notice how God has been involved in other people's lives. The homily is intended to help us recognise how God is still involved – now in our lives. It is specifically about what God is doing. A sermon is more about what we should be doing. Of course, we also need to know that, but not all our learning can be loaded on to the homily. Catholics are supposed to participate in other forms of on-going formation.

Constant moralising can lead to over-anxiety for people already harassed by the struggles of living, and can weigh them down. In contrast to this, noticing *what God is doing* in the midst of our struggles lifts us up. Contemplating God's love for us evokes our love for God.

10) Adaptations

There is a difference between aberrations and adaptations. Changes that deflect from the meaning of a given part of the Mass are aberrations and not acceptable. However, adaptations that better *bring out its meaning* actually help to fulfil the purpose intended by the rubrics. We fulfil the whole law by fulfilling its purpose; (Mark 2:23-27)

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* requires that "accommodations and adaptations" should "correspond to the meaning and character of each part of the celebration". Some adaptations require decision by the bishop, or Bishops' Conference. Smaller ones are made by the priest so that the prayer of the Church can become the prayer of the people who are present. In this way he is being faithful to his duty:

"...the age and condition of the people, their way of life, and degree of religious culture (i.e. religious formation, faith-practice etc) should be taken into account. By doing so, pastors will be fulfilling one of the chief duties of a faithful dispenser of the mysteries of God..."
(*Constitution on the Liturgy*, 19)

'...always to be kept in mind is the preservation of that freedom, envisaged by the new rubrics, to adapt the celebration in an intelligent manner to the church building, or to the group of faithful who are present, or to particular pastoral circumstances in such a way that the universal rite is truly accommodated to human understanding. (Consilium for Promoting the Constitution on the Liturgy, *Notitiae*, 1965, p 254).

Making these kinds of adaptations should be as natural as the way we adapt our vocabulary when speaking now to adults, now to children. Changing non-inclusive to inclusive language is a case in point.

11) Church architecture & furnishings:

These are meant to help us be aware of Christ's presence in the four ways he is present: in the sacrament – altar; in the word - table of the word; in the ministry of the priest – presider's chair; and in the congregation – seating arrangements.

Other furnishings and statues help to create atmosphere, but must not distract us from the liturgy itself. The tabernacle and reserved Sacrament are not part of the Mass. This is why the Church's preference is for the tabernacle to be located in a separate space within the church, suitable for the devotion due to the Blessed Sacrament, and apart from spaces that are used for other activities, such as marriages; (*Instruction on the Eucharistic Mystery*, 1967, n 53).