

REFLECTIONS SHARED WITH LATIN MASS GROUP

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The Latin Mass group's desire to celebrate Mass with deep reverence, and their concern to avoid abuses in the liturgy, are to their credit and to be taken very seriously.

Pope Francis knows this. So, what underlies his recent decision regarding the 1962 Missal? The purpose of these reflections is to help us understand his concerns. I trust we can do this on the basis of what we all have in common – our desire for that unity which Jesus wants for his disciples.

The following reflections are divided as follows:

Part I: Pope Francis' Concerns and Reasons;

Part II: Why did the Council mandate a revision?

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PART I POPE FRANCIS' CONCERNS AND REASONS

Two fair questions:

why would Pope Francis withdraw permission to use 1962 Missal which means so much to a small community of devout people, who are not seeking disunity...?

why can't the 1962 Missal and Novus Ordo simply co-exist in the same way that Church allows various rites to co-exist?

Let us look first at Pope Francis' concerns; then, at the duty of bishops.

Much is being made of the reverence and devotion of adherents of the 1962 Missal; for this they truly must be applauded. But that is not the actual issue: the issue is about non acceptance of a decision of a General Council of the Church. It is about Catholics preferring their own personal judgement and preferences over a General Council of Church's decision. (In Part II we come back to what the Council decided and why).

To have two groups of Catholics: those who do accept the Council's teaching and those who don't is the "disunity" Pope Francis is concerned about. In some quarters this disunity consists of not accepting the Council's decision to replace the existing Missal; in other quarters, the unrevised Missal has become a flagship for wider dissent, including claims that the Novus Ordo betrays Tradition and the Church. The Pope, whose role is to preside over the Church's unity, cannot ignore this.

The Council did not intend the co-existence of a revised and an unrevised Missal; to suppose otherwise is to seriously misunderstand the Council's reasons for requiring the reform.

When promulgating the revised Missal, Pope Paul made it clear that this was now the Church's Missal – incorporating and enhancing the existing Missal, and replacing its unrevised form. He also said that just as his predecessor Pius V had intended the revised Missal of his day to be "an instrument of liturgical unity", so now he intends this revised Missal to do the same; (cf Apostolic Constitution.)

What then is the status of the unrevised Missal? It was not "abrogated"; that means it was not *annulled*, which is why it can still be used in special circumstances. But it was *withdrawn from normal use*. It now lives on in the Novus Ordo.

Pope Benedict accepted that the revised Missal replaced the unrevised Missal. That is why he stipulated that when the unrevised Missal was used in special circumstances it was to be regarded as "extraordinary" - not on a par with the revised Missal. He trusted people to respect that proviso, but it has been dishonoured wherever people have been treating the extraordinary form of the Mass as if it were another "ordinary" form of the Roman Missal.

Cardinal Dew's situation is quite clear: The Motu Proprio returns authority in this matter to the bishops, but in a letter accompanying the Motu Proprio, Pope Francis spelled out the general direction they were to take. He spoke of the "need to return in due time to the Roman Rite as promulgated by Popes Paul VI and John Paul II"; and permission to use the 1962 Missal was to be "in such a way as to return to the unitary form of celebration." In other words, any further concessions could only be temporary.

PART II WHY DID THE COUNCIL MANDATE A REVISION?

At a General Council of the Church, bishops from local churches all around the world judged that the Roman Missal needed to be “somewhat revised and also enriched with additions”. (Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution.)

In his Apostolic Constitution promulgating the revised order of the Roman Missal, Pope Paul VI recognizes “the many wonderful fruits” that issued from the revision of the Roman Missal that the Council of Trent had decreed. He recalls that those revisions resulted from “the examination of ancient manuscripts, both in the Vatican library and discovered elsewhere”, and says that since then, other “very ancient sources have been discovered...” and study made of “the liturgical formularies of the Eastern Churches”. Then he says:

“.. these doctrinal and spiritual riches should not lie in the darkness of archives, but rather be brought out into the light to enlighten and nourish the minds and spirits of Christians.”

To prefer the unrevised Missal is to say we don’t need that.

It is worth noting that the Second Vatican Council’s reform of the Missal was not the first revision of the Roman Missal. And it is worth noting that the underlying reason for reform following the Council of Trent and following the Second Vatican Council was the same: a deeper study of sources that are part of our ancient Christian tradition.

Descriptions of the 1962 Missal being “the Mass of the ages”, “the Mass of all time”, and “formalised for all eternity by St Pius V” etc. are misleading in several ways: they suggest that the 1962 Missal itself is not the result of various reforms down the centuries, and they suggest that it cannot be further reformed. Worse still, they suggest that the recent revised Missal is a departure from the Catholic tradition.

Pope Paul noted that Pope Pius XII had already taken the first steps in the revision of the Roman Missal for our times, and then he briefly outlined the reasons why the Second Vatican Council wanted this work to continue:

- “texts and rites should be ordered in such a way that they express more clearly the holy things they signify ... the Order of Mass should be revised in such a way that it may be easier to see the meaning of the individual parts, and the connection between them, and that devout and active participation by the faithful may be facilitated”;
- “the treasures of the Bible be opened up more abundantly so that richer fare may be spread before the faithful at the table of God’s word”.
- “there have been restored various elements which have suffered injury through the accidents of history, e.g. the Homily, the Universal Prayer of the faithful, and the Penitential Rite or rite of reconciliation with God and the brethren at the beginning of Mass...”

The revision of the Roman Missal, including the lectionary, its translation into the languages of the people, and the re-ordering and refurbishing of churches, are three aspects of the same liturgical renewal – all intended to lead to that “full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is *demanded by the very nature of the liturgy*” (SC. 14).

PART III SOME CLARIFICATIONS; CATECHESIS

A) WHO CELEBRATES THE LITURGY?

A reason someone gave for preferring the 1962 Missal was “the priest facing the altar, because it allows time for personal prayer”. It is disappointing to hear this misunderstanding of the liturgy fifty years after the Council; however, it used to be the situation in which the Catholic people (of the Roman rite) found themselves for several hundreds of years. It started around the fifth century when the altar was pushed back to the apse of the church and the Mass became mainly something the priests celebrated; an altar server made the people’s responses for them, because Latin was no longer the people’s language. And so, understandably, the people used the time for their own personal prayers.

This is precisely the situation the Council intended to correct. It was necessary and urgent because “full, conscious and active participation” involves more than that, and “is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy” (SC, n 14). And liturgy, unlike private devotions, is of its very nature the activity of a community. United in word, silence, song or posture, we act as one body. (General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 42).

Unlike contemporary secular culture, liturgy is not about “me” and “my”. According to the prayers of the Mass itself, “offerimus” – “we offer...” The greetings and welcomes before Mass signify our coming together to form a worshipping community.

It seems we grew up using a lot of shorthand, which came to be mistaken for the whole. E.g. we referred to the Mass as commemorating “the sacrifice of Calvary”. But the Mass’s own prayers said we were commemorating “the passion of Our Lord... his resurrection... and ascension into Heaven”. We used to speak of “Father’s Mass” and of ourselves as “attending” Mass. But from earliest times, Eucharist was celebrated by the whole gathered community. The Catechism of the Catholic Church re-emphasises that it is the whole congregation that celebrates the Eucharist (n.1140). The special role of the priest does not diminish the fact that we all offer the sacrifice.

Adherents of the 1962 Missal are right to insist on reverence. But the reverence natural to private prayer and devotions, and the reverence proper to the actions of a community worshipping as one body, are different. Those who want to use the time for their own personal prayers will find the community’s actions distracting.

It has even been claimed that the “goal” of participating is inner contemplation. Yes, liturgy must be contemplative – we allow ourselves to be absorbed by it, taken up into the mysteries of our salvation, surrendering ourselves to what God is doing for us, worshipping and giving thanks... But our union with Christ doesn’t stop with “Jesus and myself” – union with Him means being “for others”. This is what makes our lives an “acceptable sacrifice” to God. This is highlighted in Holy Communion: we “become what we receive” (St Augustine), namely the body that was “broken and given up for others” and the “blood (life) that was poured out for others”. That is what we commit ourselves to by our “Amen”.

B) CHURCH ARCHITECTURE AND FURNISHINGS

Good architecture and furnishing help us to be aware of Christ’s real presence in the four ways He is present – in the sacrament (altar); in the word (lectern); in the ministry of the priest (presider’s chair); and in the congregation (seating arrangements); (Constitution on the Liturgy, 7). In this way, the furnishings facilitate our participation.

Other furnishings help to create atmosphere, but must not distract us from the liturgy itself. The tabernacle and Blessed 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 and funerals. (cf *Instruction on the Eucharistic Mystery*, 1967, n 53)

C) STANDING AND KNEELING

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 and deepen our inner dispositions. And they enable us to act together as one body.

When the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) speaks of the right of Bishops' Conferences "to adapt the actions and postures of the liturgy", it says that "such adaptations must correspond to the meaning and character of each part of the celebration" (art. 21).

Standing during the Eucharistic Prayer, (and kneeling or making a deep bow for the Consecration), is still the norm in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, but the GIRM acknowledges that the custom of kneeling is "laudable" and allows it to continue. You are NOT being asked to stand! The following comments are made only to show why standing is not irreverent, and why some Catholics believe they should stand – based on the "meaning and character" of that part of the Mass.

In many cultures, people rise to their feet as a sign of respect for someone. When we rise and stand for the Gospel, unless we are doing it out of mindless routine, we are affirming our faith in the presence of Jesus who speaks to us through the Gospel – present tense. Rising to our feet for the Eucharistic Prayer is also a way of recognising his presence and specifically his resurrection.

The oldest Eucharistic Prayers echo the early Christians' practice of standing during the Eucharistic Prayer. Eucharistic Prayer I, originating around the year 375, refers to the congregation "standing around" the altar ("circum-stantes", usually 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" (mis-translated into English as "be in Your presence".)

At Benediction, we are adoring Christ, for which the appropriate body-language is "down in adoration falling...". That is not what we are doing during the Eucharistic Prayer. The Eucharistic Prayer is addressed entirely to the Father. With Christ we are offering His and our lives to the Father. The appropriate body-language is that which best corresponds with what the Eucharistic Prayer is saying. Standing is body-language for acknowledging that in Christ we have been raised up.

St John Chrysostom forbade his people to kneel during the Easter season; so did St Augustine. The Council of Nicea (325 AD) forbade kneeling for prayer on Sundays; and when in the ninth century kneeling became more common, it was only on non-festive days, never on days that commemorated the resurrection of Jesus, i.e. Sundays and feast-days. Standing is still the posture in the Eastern Churches.

D) HAND OR TONGUE?

1) During pandemic:

Measures of hygiene aimed at preventing the spread of a potentially fatal infection are a matter of our moral responsibility towards others – as against "my" rights. This is a moral obligation.

2) In normal times:

The most ancient practice was based on Jesus' own words at the Last Supper, "take eat... take drink". The Sacrament He instituted at the Last Supper was based on the normal ways that adults take food and drink. (Placing food on the tongue is what we do for infants and disabled people.)

Concern to safeguard particles of the Host is commendable - but it has to be consistent with what we mean by sacraments. A guiding principle is that sacraments are carried out "humano modo", i.e. in the ordinary ways that people think and act.

The "matter" required for the Sacrament of Eucharist must fit the description of what people normally call bread and wine. That is what becomes the Real Presence of Christ. Particles so tiny that they wouldn't be given to you with the words "take and eat" are not what people ordinarily think of as bread. Even if they were once part of a loaf or "host," they aren't now.

We all learned that the Real Presence goes under the "appearances" of bread and wine. As seven-year-olds, we didn't need to know that what loses the appearances of bread and the qualities of wine loses the Real Presence, and so nobody mentioned it. All this is classic Catholic sacramental theology and moral theology. Unnecessary anxiety is suffered by some Catholics because the Church's teachings have not been properly passed on.

E) HOMILY OR SERMON?

Adherents of the 1962 also associate it with a different form of preaching. There are different forms of preaching (catechising, retreats, missions, etc.) Although the homily should include some catechesis, the form of preaching proper to the celebration of Eucharist is related to the place of the scriptures. Remember that before the renewal, it was commonly taught that one could miss the whole liturgy of the word and still fulfil one's Sunday obligation. The renewed liturgy corrects this legalistic minimalism, emphasizing that the Mass is word and sacrament *together*.

The readers need to know they not just reading a record of something that was said or done in the past; God "is speaking"; it's a live broadcast. So, at the end of the reading, they pause – long enough to attract attention - and then say: "the word of the Lord!" - as if to say: "listen, the Lord is speaking to us". This is more than saying "this is the word of the Lord", which could refer to something previously said - past tense.

The scripture readings combined give us a backdrop against which to notice how God has been involved in people's lives. Through their experience of adversity, God's people were being challenged to trust. Through their experience of sin and failure, they were being led to experience God's mercy. By learning to recognize God's "style," so to speak, we can more easily notice how God is present in the events of our own lives. Guided by this larger, broader picture of God's presence, we are less likely to lapse into mere self-reflection and self-perfection.

The homily is in the same vein. It is meant to help us recognize how God is present in our lives. It is specifically about what God is doing. This makes it different from a sermon, which is about what we should be doing. What God is doing in the midst of our struggles is what we most need to know. Constant moralising can lead to over-anxiety, whereas discovering how God is present in our lives, notwithstanding our weaknesses, encourages and inspires. Yes, we need to know our duties, but not all our learning needs can be loaded on to the homily. Catholics are supposed to participate in other forms of on-going formation. (*General Catechetical Directory*).

F) ABERRATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

Adherents of the 1962 Missal express concern about liturgical abuses that sometimes occur during Mass according to the *Novus Ordo*. Of course, abuses are entirely out of place in any liturgy. But we should not be too quick to judge that a given accommodation is an abuse. There are also appropriate accommodations. These are accommodations that bring out the meaning of the liturgy helping people enter into what the liturgy means. Aberrations, on the other hand, are what obscure its meaning.

It is the presiding priest's responsibility to ensure that the prayer of the Church can become the prayer of the people gathered around him. This requires adapting to their circumstances. The Council said that in facilitating participation,

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

In other words, a slavish adherence to the liturgical text, or to the rubrics, and an unadaptable way of presiding, are not ways of being “a faithful dispenser of the mysteries of God”; they are ways of being unfaithful to the priest's ministry and to his people.

Further examples may be helpful: (i) the Congregation for Divine Worship and Sacraments reminded the US Bishops' Conference (in the context of posture during the Eucharistic Prayer) that not all rubrics are proscriptive; some are descriptive. (ii) The same Congregation reminded the US bishops that some roles attributed to priests and deacons by the GIRM (e.g. pouring of the Precious Blood into chalices), can also be done by extraordinary ministers, and the consummation of excess sacred species can be done by any minister or communicant. Those bishops were being told there was no need to be looking for special dispensations!

(iii) Sometimes it is a departure from an existing law that becomes a change in the law. By definition, a “contrary custom” develops before it is officially sanctioned. Up until the 16th century, liturgical changes developed mainly in this way. Recent examples of what the rubrics did not allow but later became approved include allowing altar girls, allowing women to read from within the sanctuary, allowing women to have their feet washed on Holy Thursday...

These examples are given here only to explain why we should not be too quick to judge what is an abuse – nor conclude that there won't be further examples. Lay preaching in the church, for example, is already allowed (canon 766), though the homily is ordinarily reserved to the ordained minister (based on ordained ministry being a ministry of word and sacrament). But there are various ways in which the scope of lay preaching could increase, more in accord with what lay people did in the early Church.

When Pope Paul VI commissioned the group charged with revising the Code of Canon Law, he said what was needed was not just new laws, but “a new way of thinking” about law. This is echoed in an Instruction by the *Consilium for Promoting the Constitution on the Liturgy*:

“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. (Notitiae, 1965 p 254)ⁱ

ⁱ To some this “way of thinking about law” can seem like “breaking” the law. Rather, it has to do with the way love fulfils the law. The ego-centric self looks for safety through keeping the law - which cannot save. Jesus’ Spirit enables us to love, and in this way fulfil the law. Cf. Romans 5:5; 8:14ff; 13:8ff, etc. Fulfilling the law through fulfilling the commandment to love relieves us of the burden of self-concern and self-justification.

Judaism’s devotion to the law was commendable, but when salvation seemed to depend on keeping the law, then fear of breaking the law became fear of losing one’s salvation. This tight equation between the law and salvation neglects the role of God’s mercy. According to St Paul, difficulty keeping the law was meant to teach God’s people their need of mercy, and their absolute need of a Saviour, who alone can save.