

Tridentine Community News

January 29, 2006

The Appeal of the Classical Roman Rite

Why is there a growing desire to attend the old Latin Mass? What does it offer that one cannot find, say, in a Novus Ordo (new rite) Latin Mass? One answer lies in the prayers of the Ordinary of the Mass themselves, which you can see side by side at: <http://www.latin-mass-society.org/missals.htm>. The opening "Prayers at the Foot of the Altar", the Offertory prayers, and the post-Our Father prayers are more detailed in the Tridentine. They focus more on the unworthiness of the celebrant and the sacrificial nature of what is taking place at Holy Mass.

Second, as the above web page so aptly demonstrates, the English translations in a typical Tridentine hand missal are more faithful to the original Latin than the current official Novus Ordo English translations. Take the Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I), for example. The Latin text is virtually identical in the Novus Ordo and Tridentine, however the typical English translation one sees in a Tridentine missal is noticeably more expressive of the sacrificial event that is the Mass. A little known fact is that many of the Proper (Introit, Opening, Offertory, Closing) prayers in the original Novus Ordo Latin text are directly taken from the original Tridentine text, but they read quite differently in English due to inaccurate translation. The Vatican is seeking to remedy this problem via the establishment of the Vox Clara Commission, which is working on a more accurate English translation of the Novus Ordo.

Third, the rubrics of the Tridentine Mass are more detailed and less open to individual interpretation than those of the Novus Ordo. Witness the priest's numerous signs of the cross and genuflections during the Canon. Each gesture is imbued with meaning. Altar servers genuflect when crossing the tabernacle during Mass. Everyone in the sanctuary bows at the Holy Name of Jesus. Objects handed to the celebrant and received back from him are given a liturgical kiss, to respect the office of the priest. Holy Communion is always received kneeling and on the tongue. The

congregation does not exchange a Sign of Peace, but rather is given time to prepare for the reception of Holy Communion. All singing during Holy Mass must be in Latin, emphasizing that Mass is set apart from the rest of our lives, and reducing the likelihood of inappropriate hymns being used at the Offertory and Communion. And, of course, the Mass is celebrated *ad orientem*, that is, facing Liturgical East, the same direction as the congregation, because the priest is leading us to God.

One could argue that a Novus Ordo Latin Mass celebrated as it is at St. Joseph offers most of these elements. For almost 40 years, St. Joseph has been one of the few bastions of liturgical tradition in metropolitan Detroit, and deserves immense credit for that stance. However, on an international scale, St. Joseph is an exception to the rule. The evolution of the Novus Ordo rubrics as found in the 2002 General Instruction of the Roman Missal demonstrates a gradual departure from Tridentine norms, and significant freedom for variation in the celebration of the Mass. Two Novus Ordo Latin Masses may, in fact, differ significantly from one another, whereas most any two Tridentine Masses anywhere in the world will be pretty much the same. In our own diocese, for example, the First Friday Novus Ordo Latin Mass at Detroit's Our Lady of Mt. Carmel is celebrated with the priest facing the people, and Holy Communion is received while standing. These seemingly minor differences in fact matter a great deal to some people. Conversely, the predictability and almost guaranteed atmosphere of reverence at any Tridentine Mass is a source of spiritual comfort, and is demonstrative of the catholicity, or universality, of our Holy Faith.

Is the Tridentine Mass for everyone? Of course not. For example, some people may find the silence of the Canon and the more extended periods of kneeling to detract from a fulfilling experience. But there is no question that this historic form of Holy Mass clearly articulates our Holy Catholic Faith, and has inspired countless saints and martyrs through the ages. It is a part of our liturgical heritage and has been restored as a legitimate liturgical option for Latin Rite Catholics.

