

Tridentine Community News

February 5, 2006

The Tridentine Mass Makes a Comeback

Have you ever wondered just how the Traditional Latin Mass has returned into use? It is a little-known fact that it was only entirely banned from public celebration between 1970-71. Today, we will examine the history of the “indults”, or permissions, to celebrate this historic form of the Roman Rite of the Church.

Evolution of the Roman Rite

The “Tridentine” order, or form, of Mass is so named because it was originally promulgated in 1570 at the Council of Trent. That council did not change the Mass, so much as issue a uniform missal to reduce the number of local variations of the Mass. This missal survived for centuries with minimal modifications. For example, the final changes issued in 1962 added the name of St. Joseph to the Canon or Eucharistic Prayer and suppressed the server’s Confiteor prior to Holy Communion. It is this final, 1962 edition, which the Holy See has established as the norm for Tridentine Masses celebrated today.

In 1965, right after Vatican II, a temporary, transitional order of Mass was published. The “1965 Missal” was in many respects a vernacular translation of the Tridentine Mass. The Propers, or readings, of the 1965 Missal were essentially the same as the Tridentine.

In 1970, His Holiness Pope Paul VI promulgated a revised standard order of Holy Mass for public celebration, commonly referred to today as the Novus Ordo. The text of the Ordinary of this Mass was substantially shorter than, and different from, the 1962 and 1965 editions. New Propers (readings and prayers) were scheduled according to three year (for Sundays) and two year (for weekdays) cycles, to replace the Tridentine one year calendar. Just as the Tridentine Missal experienced relatively small changes over time, the Novus Ordo Mass has also been modified, first in 1975, and most recently in 2002. The relative insignificance of these modifications has caused most people to differentiate only between the Novus Ordo and Tridentine in general, and not to compare, say, the 1958 Tridentine vs. the 1975 Novus Ordo.

1971: The Agatha Christie Indult

In response to a petition signed by some prominent British cultural figures in 1971, Pope Paul VI permitted the continued celebration of the Tridentine Mass in England and Wales under certain conditions. This

permission has become popularly known as the “Agatha Christie Indult”, because the Holy Father was moved that she had been one of the signatories. From 1971-84, the only place in the world where one could attend a licit public Tridentine Mass was the U.K.

1984: Worldwide Permission Is Granted

By 1984, petitions from the faithful for re-authorization of the Tridentine Mass had become more frequent, plus the Swiss-based Society of St. Pius X (“SSPX”) had been growing considerably. Led by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, the SSPX had continued to ordain priests to celebrate the Tridentine Mass exclusively. SSPX chapels had been established worldwide in defiance of local bishops. While the SSPX and similar groups have attracted much press over the years, it is important to note that demand for the Traditional Mass has come from Catholics faithful to their local bishops as well as from members of dissident groups. Pope John Paul II recognized a genuine need, and so in 1984, the Congregation for Divine Worship issued the letter *Quattor Abhinc Annos*, which authorized public celebrations of the Tridentine Mass with permission of the local bishop, under relatively restrictive conditions.

1988: Real Impetus Is Given

Despite those restrictions, numerous Mass sites sprung up in response to petitions by the faithful. The Vatican took notice. Separately, in 1988, Archbishop Lefebvre took the unfortunate step of consecrating bishops without Vatican approval. In response to both of these developments, Pope John Paul II issued the now-famous apostolic letter, *Ecclesia Dei Adflicta*, which changed the tone of approval from Rome from tolerance to encouragement for those who desired to receive the sacraments according to the 1962 forms. A substantial number of bishops worldwide responded to the Holy Father’s invitation for a “wide and generous application” of the classic Roman liturgical books. It is under the *Ecclesia Dei* indult that Cardinal Maida has extended permission for the classic Roman Mass to be offered at St. Josaphat Church, where we desire to worship in the ancient form in union with our Holy Father and the Magisterium.

Since 1988, numerous religious communities have been established whose sacramental life is built around the 1962 versions of the sacraments. These organizations, plus the countless indult sites, ensure a healthy future for the Traditional Roman Mass.