

Tridentine Community News

April 16, 2006

Glorious Day, Glorious Church: The Brompton Oratory, London

Today, as we celebrate the Resurrection of Our Lord, it is fitting that we discuss one of the most glorious Catholic churches operating in our age, the Oratory of St. Philip Neri on Brompton Road in London, England.

London itself is arguably the most liturgically sophisticated city in Christendom. Future columns will address the many other wonders of Roman Catholic London. But any discussion of her treasures must begin with the Oratory, ground zero for the reverent celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass according to both the Novus Ordo and Tridentine rites.

Almost any discussion of the Tridentine Mass will sooner or later reference the famous statement of Fr. Frederick Faber, "The Mass is the most beautiful thing this side of heaven." Fr. Faber was the founder of the London Oratory and is buried in its St. Wilfrid Chapel, the most appropriate site of a weekly Saturday Tridentine Mass. Fr. Faber's words have always had special significance at the Oratory: As mentioned in a previous column, England has enjoyed an indult to celebrate the Tridentine Mass since 1971, thus the Oratory only went one year (1970) without being able to celebrate the Traditional Roman Rite.

Like Washington, DC's Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception or St. Paul, Minnesota's Cathedral of St. Paul, the Oratory is a church whose sheer scale takes one's breath away upon initial entry. But unlike many such edifices, this is a vibrant facility, with Masses being offered throughout the day on various side altars, and at least one priest seemingly always in one of its myriad of confessionals. Daily Tridentine and Novus Ordo Latin Masses complement the regular English Mass schedule. All Masses are celebrated *ad orientem*, that is, with the priest facing the altar along with the people. Even the Novus Ordo Latin Masses employ altar cards on the altar.

Upon a recent visit to the Oratory for a Saturday Tridentine Mass, this writer was surprised to see a second Tridentine Mass in progress at a side altar while departing the one that

had concluded in St. Wilfrid's Chapel. Stop and consider that: Multiple Tridentine Masses occurring on a Saturday in one church, while we are presently permitted only one per week each in Windsor and Detroit.

Fans of the Harry Potter movies will be interested to learn that the Hogwarts School Choir occasionally featured in the films is actually the London Oratory Junior Choir. That choir sings at, among other things, the weekly Tuesday night Benediction service that follow the 6:00 PM Novus Ordo Latin Mass. How impressive to see a 40 member choir processing in on a Tuesday night!

Sundays are major events. At 9:00 AM, a Tridentine Mass is celebrated at the high altar. At 11:00 AM, a Solemn Novus Ordo Latin Mass with a professional choir attracts a standing-room only congregation. At 3:00 PM, Solemn Vespers and Benediction are offered in Latin. Other Masses are scattered throughout the day.

Tridentine Low Masses are offered at 7:00 AM and (usually) 8:00 AM daily at various side altars.

The main sanctuary is a sight to behold. At 70 feet deep and proportionately wide, it is one of the largest sanctuaries this writer has ever seen. It is put to full use: With a sizable contingent of Oratorian Fathers in residence, every major service attracts a cadre of clerics, in traditional vestments and birettas. Their attention to detail in rubrics is memorable, especially during Vespers.

The Oratory has also put together one of England's most popular hymnals, "The Catholic Hymn Book." Were it not for the unusual layout of music at the top of the page and lyrics on the bottom, this hymnal would surely be employed in more parishes in North America.

By offering both the Tridentine Mass and the Novus Ordo with all of the traditional trappings, the Brompton Oratory vivifies what was envisioned in the Vatican II document on the liturgy, "*Sacrosanctum Concilium*." You can begin to appreciate the liturgical life of this parish by exploring their (surprisingly humble) web site: www.bromptonoratory.com

