

# Tridentine Community News

May 14, 2006

## *Forms of the Tridentine Mass*

When people speak of the “old Latin Mass,” they often employ the terms “High Mass” and “Low Mass.” Actually, there are several distinct forms of the Tridentine Mass, each with their own rubrics, or rules for celebration. Because of their somewhat elaborate formal names, these official titles are not often used. Nevertheless, it is advantageous, and indeed interesting, to understand the diverse options of celebration available in this rite.

Low Mass: This term generally refers to a Mass without music. A sub-variant, which is not an official form, became prevalent during the 1950s and is still seen occasionally today, the “Low Mass With Hymns”: Entrance, Recessional, and occasionally Offertory hymns are sung, but the Mass itself is entirely recited, without musical accompaniment.

Missa Cantata: A sung Mass said by a priest without deacon or subdeacon. It has two sub-forms: Simple Form: One or two servers, nothurifer (incense) or Asperges (sprinkling rite). This is the form of Mass usually employed at St. Michael. Solemn Form: Multiple servers with defined roles, incense, and Asperges. This is the form of Mass most often employed at St. Josaphat.

Solemn High Mass: A sung Mass celebrated by a priest with deacon and subdeacon. The rubrics are quite different from those of a Missa Cantata, as the deacon and subdeacon have substantial roles.

Low Mass Said by a Bishop: A Mass said by a bishop with greater solemnity than were he to celebrate “as a priest.” The rubrics are not all that specific, and seem to allow sub-forms modeled on both the music-free Low Mass and the Missa Cantata. The bishop does not wear his mitre or carry a crosier. He is assisted at the altar by two “chaplains”, one of whom must be in major orders; they do not officially perform the roles of deacon or subdeacon. A large book, the “Pontifical Canon,” takes the place of the altar cards. The bishop prays before and after Mass at a “faldstool”, or covered bench, placed in front of the altar. This is the form of Mass recently celebrated by Bishop Boyea at St. Josaphat.

Pontifical Solemn Mass at the Throne: The most elaborate form of Mass that a bishop can celebrate. Goes beyond the Solemn High Mass in complexity of rubrics. Involves an Assistant Priest, two deacons, one subdeacon, and many special altar server roles. It may only be celebrated by the Ordinary of a diocese. Visiting ordinaries from other dioceses may only celebrate this form of Mass with prior approval from the local ordinary. Auxiliary bishops may not celebrate this form. This type of Mass was celebrated in October, 2005 by Bishop Mengeling at All Saints Church in Flint.

Pontifical Mass at the Faldstool: Similar to a Mass at the Throne, but for auxiliaries and other bishops lacking permission to celebrate at the throne. As with the Pontifical Low Mass, a faldstool is set before the altar.



Dialogue Mass: A Mass in which the congregation, and not just the servers, makes the responses. This is not an alternative form of Mass per se, but rather a sub-form of celebrating the primary forms of Mass. This was originally permitted, and indeed

encouraged, by the Vatican in 1958. It has become prevalent at most sung Tridentine Masses today. Not all Low Mass sites are Dialogue Masses, however: It seems that if a Mass is regularly scheduled to be a Low Mass, people are less likely to make the responses. If musician(s) happen to be absent on a one-time basis at a Sunday Mass that is usually sung, the congregation typically does join in the responses, as that is what they are accustomed to doing. As a point of interest, this same 1958 ruling even provides the option for the congregation to recite (but not sing) the entire Pater Noster along with the priest, however this is virtually never done in practice.

In addition, there are Masses for the Dead, Nuptial Masses, Masses Celebrated by a Priest in the Presence of a Prelate, and a few other forms, each with unique rubrics.

When someone asks you if we have a “High Mass” on Sundays, strictly speaking, the answer is no, we have a Missa Cantata, technically a form of Low Mass. But one must consider one’s audience, and for most people, “High Mass” means a Mass with music. That, indeed, we have.