

Tridentine Community News

December 17, 2006

Inside Vs. Outside of the Mass

This column has many times made mention of the beauty and clarity of the rubrics of the Tridentine Mass. They precisely define, for instance, what is part of the Mass, and what is external to it. Those definitions are accompanied by signs that help the faithful clearly understand when we are “in” the Mass.

First of all, just what “are” the rubrics? Most, but not all, are provided in the red text in the *Missale Romanum*, the altar missal. You may have heard the expression, “Read the black, do the red.” This derives from the colors of the text in the altar missal. Interspersed with the black text of the Mass are red instructions in Latin such as *discooperit calicem* (uncover the chalice), *fáciat signum crucis super hóstiam* (make the sign of the cross over the Host), and the self-explanatory *genuflexit*. You are welcome to come to the sacristy after Mass to take a close look at the altar missal for yourself. You might be surprised at how specific these guidelines are.

Other rubrics are specified or clarified over time in documents from the (old) Congregation for Sacred Rites, now known as the Congregation for Divine Worship; the *Rituale Romanum*, which covers everything from baptisms to blessing of Holy Water; to letters from the Ecclesia Dei Commission. The value of a reference book such as Fortescue/O’Connell/Reid’s “The Ceremonies of the Roman Rite Described” is to bring together all of the rubrics from these various sources into one master reference, with footnotes referencing their origin.

Visual Cues

During the entrance and exit processions, the celebrant, deacon, subdeacon, and other ordained ministers wear birettas (hats), as a sign of humility and to signify that Mass is not underway. The birettas are removed before Mass begins, but are put on again if they choose to sit down during a lengthy sung Kyrie, Gloria, or Credo, as those are technically short breaks from the proceedings of the Mass.

In the Tridentine Mass, the *Asperges*, or sprinkling rite, occurs before, and outside, the Mass. It is only permitted on Sundays, meaning, for example, that we will not have it this year on Christmas Day. To signify that the *Asperges* is external to the Mass, the priest wears a cope, a robe-like garment, instead of the chasuble vestment that he wears during Mass. After the *Asperges*, the celebrant changes into the chasuble before beginning Mass. By contrast, in the Novus Ordo, the *Asperges* is one of the options for the Penitential Rite; because it occurs within the Mass, the celebrant wears a chasuble for it.

Similarly, if there are any devotions following Mass, such as Benediction or prayers to a saint, the priest changes out of the chasuble into a cope before beginning them.

The homily is considered a hiatus in the Mass. For expediency’s sake, the priest does not remove the chasuble before the homily, but he does remove the maniple, the “waiter’s napkin”-like garment around his left arm. In certain churches, it is also customary for the priest to put on the biretta while delivering the sermon. These gestures signify that what the priest is about to do, is on his own initiative. He has freedom to read the Epistle and Gospel in the vernacular, read announcements, and deliver a homily based on his own thoughts. None of these acts are codified in the Missal, therefore they are not “a part of” Mass.

Even within the Mass, Holy Mother Church makes a distinction between the portions of the Mass occurring at the altar, and those before and after the central actions. For the Prayers at the Foot of the Altar at the beginning of Mass, the Acolytes (altar servers) kneel *in plano*, or on the main floor before the altar platform. Only when the priest ascends the altar do the Acolytes move to their normal resting position on the first step of the altar. Likewise for the genuflection during the Last Gospel, the Acolytes kneel *in plano*, and not on the first step, because at that point, we are past the central sacrificial part of the Mass.



Auditory Cues

The distinction between in and out of Mass is also made with regards to music: The vernacular is only permitted outside of Mass, hence the Entrance and Recessional hymns may be (but are not required to be) in English. The Offertory Hymn, if there is one, must be in Latin, as it occurs inside of Mass. Any choral pieces sung during the Offertory or while Holy Communion is distributed must also be in Latin. This line of thinking provides another rationale for why the priest removes the maniple for the homily, which is conducted in the vernacular.

One might ask why the music is limited to Latin, since it is not specified in the missal and is up to the music director’s judgment. The answer is that the music is performed while sacred actions of the Mass are taking place, thus it must conform to the standards of the Mass.

To some, these detailed rubrics may seem like much ado about nothing. But as one develops an appreciation for just what goes on at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, one can only admire the subtle ways in which Holy Mother Church helps us to distinguish the more sacred from the less so.