

Tridentine Community News

February 4, 2007

Tridentine Travelogue: Mission San Juan Capistrano Orange County, California

Between 1984-88, starting up a Tridentine Mass site meant venturing into a brave new frontier. The Vatican's indult, *Quattuor Abinc Annos*, re-permitting public celebration of the Tridentine Mass, had just been issued. Bishops were mostly unaware of this document, and didn't necessarily know how to respond to it even if they did know it had been published.

Into this unknown territory ventured one William Robert Opelle, in cooperation with veteran priest Fr. Harry Marchosky. They



figured that no better place existed for the church's historic liturgy in their part of the world than the oldest Catholic church in California: the Serra Chapel at the historic Mission in San Juan Capistrano.

Named after the California equivalent of Michigan's intrepid Fr. Gabriel Richard, Fr. Junipero Serra founded numerous mission churches in California. Fr. Serra's original chapel at Capistrano has been preserved intact and is as an ideal setting for the Traditional Mass.

The Diocese of Orange, California, comprising the southern suburbs of metropolitan Los Angeles, approved Opelle and Marchosky's plan, and to this day a standing room-only congregation attends the 8:00 AM Sunday Tridentine Mass. One must arrive no later than 7:15 AM to be assured of a seat. Only one Sunday per month is a sung Mass.

Remember being refused a table in a restaurant because you weren't wearing a coat and tie? You can still get that feeling at Capistrano: Right before Mass, an authoritarian gentleman addresses the congregation, informing them that in order to receive Holy Communion, one must be properly attired, "lest you be embarrassed." The surprisingly harsh tone of this statement could drive away first-timers expecting a more welcoming spirit, but it doesn't seem to have hurt attendance at all.

Opelle parlayed his success with the Capistrano Mass to starting up "The Traditional Mass Society", the original U.S. branch of the international *Una Voce* organization. Opelle campaigned for many years for a "Traditional Ordinarate", that is, a bishop appointed by the Vatican to oversee Tridentine Mass communities. So far this controversial idea has not yet come to fruition, but the concept is still being debated.

Fr. Marchosky has since retired. The Capistrano Mass is currently celebrated by priests of the Norbertine order.

Questions? Comments? Ideas for a future column? Please e-mail info@windsorlatinmass.org with your thoughts.

St. Michael's Abbey, Silverado, California

Any discussion of the Tridentine Mass in Southern California must include mention of the Norbertine canons at St. Michael's Abbey. This rapidly growing monastery, located in the hills of Orange County, is worth a visit if you are in the area. It provides a silent, contemplative, Catholic contrast to the nearby, massive Saddleback Church, best known as the home of the author of "The Purpose Driven Life".

While the Norbertines do not at present celebrate the Traditional Mass publicly at their monastery, they do celebrate the Capistrano Mass, the San Diego Tridentine Mass at Holy Cross Cemetery Chapel, and the soon-to-debut Traditional Mass at the John Paul II Polish Center in Yorba Linda. They also substitute at other Tridentine Masses in the region.

Befitting a monastery located near Hollywood, the Norbertines seem picture-perfect in their unique white cassocks. Every Mass, Benediction, and Divine Office service is rendered in flawless chant by the whole monastic community

(days alternate between English and [Novus Ordo] Latin). Think of a male equivalent to Ann Arbor's Dominican



Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist: Average age seems around 35. The community has so many vocations that they have purchased property nearby for an expanded abbey, while intending to keep the existing property for the boys' school they operate, St. Michael's Prep. Hopefully the new monastery will be more ornate than the stark facility they now have.

The Norbertines also administer or help out at parishes in the area, including St. John the Baptist in Costa Mesa, which was recently un-wreckovated and implemented a Latin-centric music program (see www.sjbcostamesa.org), and historic Ss. Peter & Paul in Wilmington, perhaps the most traditional Novus Ordo parish in Southern California (see www.sppc.us).

And they have local connections: Fr. Mark Borkowski spent the first years of his formation at St. Michael's Abbey, where he was known as Brother Casimir. Windsor's Patrick Tonkin, now known as Brother John Berchmanns of the (Tridentine) Canons Regular of the New Jerusalem in St. Louis, Missouri, spends his summers at St. Michael's Abbey, helping to run their summer camp. In fact, the CRNJ canons originally lived at St. Michael's Abbey after their order was formed a few years ago.

For more information about St. Michael's Abbey, see www.abbeynews.com.