

On the Occasion of the 1st Anniversary of the Motu Proprio and the 20th Anniversary of the FSSP

Family squabbles are the worst, though there is a tenderness which can follow a row between loved ones.

There has been a family squabble for some time now amongst Catholics, regarding the liturgy. When Pope Paul VI promulgated a New Order of Mass, it was received with mixed emotions. Some were overjoyed with the promulgation, some were dismayed, some waited to see what would happen next, and others just walked away from the practice of the Faith altogether, and have stayed away.

I cannot give you the numbers on these groups; assigning numbers to them is too complicated a task, with too many factors to be considered. And it is well beyond the scope of this sermon to address all the groups. Instead, I wish to consider just one; those who were dismayed not so much by the promulgation of a New Order of Mass, but by the loss and even the destruction of the Old Order of Mass.

Talk about being between a rock and a hard place! The rock was the successor of St. Peter, Pope Paul VI. The hard place was the Mass, which they loved. They were ordered to give up what they had loved, what they had cherished, what they had been taught to love and cherish. Many did give it up, but some could not.

And what followed was a family squabble that has been going on for forty years, about the length of time since the Old Order of Mass was at this cathedral. Can there be a tenderness now within the family of the Church? Can we pray with King Solomon from the Canticle of Canticles, “Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come. For the winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in our land?” (Cant. 2.10-12) For this is how some Catholics feel about the Old Order of Mass; it is to us a love, a beautiful one. But is the winter now past?

I think the answer is yes, and we have entered a springtime where new shoots of the Old Rite are springing up all over. There is a tenderness now that we have not seen in a long time. Take this Mass this afternoon. From the graciousness of the Archbishop to the courtesy of the Rector of the cathedral, down to the hospitality of the sacristan of the cathedral, there is a tenderness. This Mass would have been impossible just ten years ago I think. So what shall we do in reaction to it? We should exalt in the Cross, which is the feast day we celebrate today; sweet the wood, sweet the nails, sweet the load that hangs thereon; as the versicle says in the Alleluia.

To pray in such a way – that the nails are sweet – is to embrace the fact that the 40 year trial of the Old Order of Mass is and has been like any trial, permitted by God, for our salvation. And that is why the instrument is sweet. The brutal nails in themselves are not sweet, but what Christ accomplished through them is.

It is like the crucifix at La Salette, which Our Lady showed Melanie, with two instruments on either side of it: a hammer, and a pair of pliers. We can hammer the nails in deeper into the Lord by the way we live, or we can pull them out by the way we live. We can take the 40 year trial of the Old Order of Mass as a means of sanctification, or we can behave like some of the Hebrews in their wandering in the Sinai desert for 40 years. The choice is ours.

They murmured against their leaders Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, not liking the food they had been given. They received the heavenly manna in return. And the Fathers of the

Church testify that for those who ate the manna with a good heart, whatever food they were longing for at the time, the manna tasted like that food, and satisfied that longing. For those whose hearts were not good, it had no such quality.

Just so, there are Catholics who can go to the New Order of Mass and murmur unceasingly, bitter in their complaint about it, and there are Catholics who murmur the same about the Old Order of Mass. Neither kind of murmuring is good for the soul. The two orders, or forms of the Roman Rite as Pope Benedict calls them, are identical in their essence, which is the sacrifice of our blessed Lord. If any priest consecrates the Holy Eucharist in the Ordinary Form of the Mass, it is the Lord.

If any priest consecrates the Holy Eucharist in the Extraordinary Form of the Mass, it is the Lord. Granted, the accidents or the things which surround the Masses are greatly different. But the essence is the same, as it is for all of the 27 different rites of Mass in the Roman Catholic Church. But what we do with the heavenly food that is provided us is our choice.

Let me make this more concrete, since it is quite possible to attend Holy Mass in either form, and see the Mass celebrated in a dismal, an unfaithful, even a disgraceful manner. I have heard stories of the Old Order being celebrated in such a hurried fashion that a Sunday Mass, with a sermon took only 25 minutes. That would have been a disgrace. I’ve seen the New Order celebrated disgracefully, too. So what can Catholics do when they are confronted with travesty in the Sacred Liturgy? There are many answers to that problem, and I wish to leave you with just one.

Shortly after I entered the Catholic Church, I went to Mass at the local parish in Lawrence, Kansas, where I was attending university. The priest came out in lay clothes, with a multi-colored stole over the jeans and t-shirt. With a strange and distorted Sign of the Cross, he spread the morning newspaper over the altar, and began to comment on the humor in the cartoon section. This was his substitute for what is called the Liturgy of the Word in the Ordinary Form of the Mass. People began to walk out. Some were furious, others in tears, others in shock. I stayed up to the consecration, which was not a consecration at all, since the priest changed the words of consecration, thus making sure that the Mass was not valid. I walked out too, with a double genuflection, joining the crowd outside and listening to the consternation. Plans of protest and correction were being made, letters to the Archbishop, plans of reparation discussed.

Many of my friends who were students at the university were in one group, toward which I gravitated. One of our number – there were about 30 students there as I recall – stayed in church for the whole thing. We were surprised, and one of us asked him when he got out, “How could you possibly have stayed for that disaster?” His answer humbled all of us. He stared a little at the ground, and pushed around a pebble with the toe of his shoe, and with eyes downcast he said, “Well, I figured that when Christ was being crucified, everybody left except his Mother, St. John and few others. So I was just trying to be like them.” Just trying to be like them...

My brethren, he chose the higher path. He cast his net into deeper waters. This is a way that any Catholic can go to Mass, if the Mass is poorly, even disgracefully celebrated. We always have a choice. We can unite ourselves to His passion, and exalt in the Cross, and ask our good Lord and Savior to remember us when He comes into His kingdom, or we can complain to Him, and demand that He get us out of there.

We adore Thee O Christ, and we praise Thee, because by Thy holy cross, Thou hast redeemed the world.