

## Interview of Fr. Jackson by Mr. Porfiri

**Q.** Let us talk about some misconception surrounding the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite. Why the priests says some prayers at the foot of the altar and don't start directly with the Introit?

**A.** The prayers at the foot are a solemn preparation for Mass. All rites of Mass have some preparation, be it an entrance procession or music of some kind, but the Rite of St. Gregory does far more than sing a song or just process up to the altar. St. Augustine puts it this way: "There is an invisible and heavenly altar, which the unjust can never approach. No one comes to that heavenly altar but he who comes to this altar with care. He will find his life there, if at this altar, he distinguishes his cause." The prayers at the foot recognize this heavenly altar, and the necessity of approaching it with great care.

The 42<sup>nd</sup> Psalm is used for this preparation, with the antiphon "I will go unto the altar of God, to God Who giveth joy to my youth." "Unto God": this is God's altar. Men can spend their whole lives searching for love and acceptance, but only God can fulfill this; not even a beloved spouse can do it.

"Who giveth joy to my youth." Youth here refers not to a man's age, but to the soul. God is the one who scrapes off the barnacles, the detritus of life's sins and mistakes, and the garbage collected in the soul. His grace makes the soul young again; young in the sense of a restored innocence.

Besides referring to restored innocence, the term youth in the Forty-Second Psalm is to be understood as the supernatural and spiritual new life obtained by regeneration in the grace of the Holy Ghost. By grace, the old man of sin (Rom. 6:6) is destroyed in us and the newness of life in the Holy Ghost is given in its place (Col. 3:9)

So whoever approaches the altar as a spiritually newborn child—that is, full of holy simplicity, innocence, and purity of mind—will find that his youthfulness of spirit (that is, his fervor and cheerfulness in the service of God) or his young (that is, his still tender and weak) life of grace daily grows and waxes strong under the blessed influence of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. There is much more to the Psalm and the preparation than this, but hopefully I've whetted the appetite of your readers for more about the Prayers at the Foot.

**Q.** Why the readings are in Latin?

**A.** Unity, beauty, coherence. Take unity. Cardinal Cajetan once said to Martin Luther, "You know, a time will come when a man will no longer be able to say, 'I speak Latin and am a Christian' and go his way in peace. There will come frontiers, frontiers of all kinds – between men – and there will be no end to them." The Cardinal was right, the loss of unity (and language is not a small component of unity) in the Church had an enormous effect upon the loss of unity in Christendom.

The great Benedictine Abbot Dom Prosper Guéranger wrote this: "Hatred for the Latin language is inborn in the hearts of all the enemies of Rome. They recognize it as the bond among

Catholics throughout the universe, as the arsenal of orthodoxy against all the subtleties of the sectarian spirit.

The spirit of rebellion which drives them to confide the universal prayer to the idiom of each people, of each province, of each century, has for the rest produced its fruits, and the reformed themselves constantly perceive that the Catholic people, in spite of their Latin prayers, relish better and accomplish with more zeal the duties of the cult than most do the Protestant people. At every hour of the day, divine worship takes place in Catholic churches. The faithful Catholic, who assists, leaves his mother tongue at the door. Apart from the sermons, he hears nothing but mysterious words which, even so, are not heard in the most solemn moment of the Canon of the Mass. Nevertheless, this mystery charms him in such a way that he is not jealous of the lot of the Protestant, even though the ear of the latter doesn't hear a single sound without perceiving its meaning. We must admit it is a master blow of Protestantism to have declared war on the sacred language. If it should ever succeed in ever destroying it, it would be well on the way to victory. Exposed to profane gaze, like a virgin who has been violated, from that moment on the Liturgy has lost much of its sacred character, and very soon people find that it is not worthwhile putting aside one's work or pleasure in order to go and listen to what is being said in the way one speaks on the marketplace"

**Q.** Why the readings cannot be proclaimed from a layperson?

**A.** Actually they can under certain circumstances – by what is called a straw subdeacon – but normally one should be ordained to do this. It's similar to why a layperson normally does not touch the Holy Eucharist. His hands are not consecrated to do so, and a layman is not consecrated to read the Scriptures at Mass.

I should point out that in the Ordinary Form of the Roman rite only an installed Lector can do the readings. I don't know why this is ignored largely; I suspect it is because only a man can be installed as a Lector, and so Catholic feminists would recoil from such a notion.

**Q.** Why the priests wear a biretta? What is the meaning?

**A.** First to have something to take off! That is, the Rite of St. Gregory contains much courtesy (a word which refers to the manners of the court). So being able to doff one's hat to the superior is humane and reverent. But the meaning of that curious looking hat is rather profound; or perhaps I should say that the meaning I see in it (being guided by the medieval knack of symbolic understanding is this: It has four corners. This signifies that the priest should preach the gospel to the four corners of the earth, "teaching all nations" (Mt. 28:19). There are three tabs on it to represent the Holy Trinity, which is the highest and greatest of our doctrines. So the biretta is physically above all the other vestments, as the dogma of the Trinity is above all other dogmas. You might have noticed that the priest puts on the biretta holding only the middle tab. And when the servers hand the biretta to the priest, they hand it in such a way that the priest may take it by the middle tab. This middle tab represents

Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, as it is only through Him, only by virtue of His Incarnation, that we can grasp the truth of the Trinity.

**Q.** Why the Eucharistic prayer is not audible from the faithful?

**A.** I suppose we could just as well ask “Why in the world would you say the Canon out loud?” It never was in history. The original Masses celebrated in the Holy Sepulcher demanded silence, since there was so little room in there, and the faithful could not have heard it.

But a fuller reason has to do with the first Mass Christ said from the Cross. Most of His prayer was to His Father, and very few words directed to us. I like how St. Remegius reflected on this silence. “When praise and thanksgiving have been made for the great grace of our redemption, then comes a silence on all the Church. The noise of words stops: the heart’s devotion attends to God alone: and the priest, accompanied by the prayers and desires of all, begins to pour forth the prayer.”

**Q.** How come the priests only make audible, during the Eucharistic prayer, the phrase “Nobis quoque peccatoribus” (to us also sinners)?

**A.** During the Roman Canon, there are seven times in which the priest breaks the silence so to speak, and each of these seven times corresponds to the seven last words the Lord spoke from the Cross. St. Albert the Great comments on this prayer; “He says, *And to us sinners*, who intercede for others, when we ourselves have greater need of others’ prayers. Therefore the priest at this moment raises his voice a little and strikes his breast. The striking denotes the work of satisfying for sin, since a blow brings pain. The audible speech denotes the act of confession.” The celebrant strikes his breast once, that our humility might be as becoming as the prayer of the publican who struck his breast, and also to signify that Christ died once for us sinners.

This is the prayer of the Good Thief, who openly acknowledged his sins: “We receive the due reward of our deeds” (Lk. 23:41). It also recalls those who returned from the Crucifixion, “lamenting and striking their breasts” (Lk. 23:48).

**Q.** Why the Our Father is sung only from the priest and the faithful can only joining in the last phrase?

**A.** The priest is an *alter Christus* in the Mass – another Christ. So in the Our Father the priest represents Christ praying on behalf of the whole Church to the Father. This is expressed by his hands in the *orans* position (palms lifted toward heaven). The faithful do not turn their hands up in this way, but keep them folded while listening attentively to the intercession of Christ.

So this corresponds to the seventh and last word Christ spoke from the Cross: “Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.” Eutychius writes that Jesus uttered these words with a loud voice, to make all men understand that He was the true Son of God, calling God His

Father. But St. John Chrysostom writes that He cried with a loud voice to teach us that He did not die of necessity, but of His own free will, uttering so strong a voice at the very moment when He was about to end His life, This was in conformity with what Jesus had said during His life, that He voluntarily sacrificed His life for His sheep, and not through the will and malice of His enemies: I lay down My life for My sheep ... No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. [John 10:15] So the response is done in a loud voice signifying that we are one with His sacrifice.

**Q.** Why the priest repeat three times himself the phrase “*Domine, non sum dignus*” before inviting the faithful to do the same?

**A.** First, an Enlightenment understanding of how things should go would mean that it should be said only once. But we repeat things three times at several points during the Mass. For me, if I just say something once, then I have a certain participation in it...but it is easy to let the significance slip. But if it is done three times, it drives the point home.

Besides, the doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Trinity is expressed well in this little prayer, where I exclaim to the Father, and then to the Son, and then to the Holy Ghost that I am not worthy of this indwelling. For more on this doctrine, read the magnificent work of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity on it.

**Q.** How come the Confiteor it is said before Communion?

**A.** It is not required – in fact it is not in the missal. But it is a long, long custom established during a time. And it serves a good purpose; it can be used to prepare better to receive the Host if there has been willful distraction during the Mass.

**Q.** Why at the end of the Mass the priest read the Gospel of John?

**A.** There are historical reasons for this, but first understand that it is not at the end of the Mass. The Last Gospel is said after the Mass is over, and it is the priest’s solemn thanksgiving, like the Prayers at the Foot are the solemn preparation.

It is said quietly, since after His death on the cross Christ went to heaven to engage in the eternal thanksgiving to His Father, to which we are not privy, so in the High Mass the priest turns to the Gospel side of the altar to say the Last Gospel quietly. It is said out loud in the Low Mass, as an expression that while we do not know the extent of the prayer of the Son to the Father and with the Holy Ghost, some of that conversation is known to us by revelation.