

Keeping the Mass, I

go wrong in the celebration of the liturgy, plus questions about rubrics and various questions about how much more of a Mass stipend you could receive for a sung Mass as opposed to a low Mass. And that's about it. You celebrated this Mass because the Church told you celebrate it. You didn't study it as a source of wisdom or expression of the reality of God; you simply did it correctly. It was approached largely (as far as I can tell – I wasn't there) as a matter of obedience, not love.

Now this may sound odd, but bear with me. About seven years ago a bishop asked me to come to give a talk to a group of his priests about the old Mass. And I took the approach that I did in my book on it – explaining the Mass by understanding its symbolism. Afterwards there were questions. A few priests were angry about it, because altar girls and communion in the hand are not foreseen in the rite. These priests were a little older than me, and that reaction is typical of my generation of priests. But one priest was considerably older, and the look on his face seemed like anger, but I couldn't make it out. He raised his hand and said, "If I knew a fraction of what you just told us about this Mass, I would have never given it up." He said this with great passion, fiercely, even some anguish of soul. I think the good father was a product of that early seminary training.

Coupled with this ignorance about the Mass was a deep skepticism about, well, everything that was Catholic, which came from the historical-critical (heils-geschichte) method of study that was introduced into priestly formation in the 1930's.

This method investigates the origins of a text and compares them to other texts written at the same time, or before or after the text in question, and seeks to know who the author was, and what his original intention in writing was. The method therefore focuses primarily, even exclusively, on the human origins of a text. That's not wrong in itself of course, but it is incomplete, because the sa-

cred Scriptures have a human origin indeed, but also a divine one. They are inspired by God the Holy Ghost. He did not act independently of the human authors – as if those authors were mere stenographers – but neither was He bound by those human limitations.

So, by the time I was in seminary in the late 70's, this method had become supreme, and my professors insisted that it was the only way to view scripture. Any mention of the Fathers of the Church was quickly dismissed as irrelevant. They were zealots if you will; insisting that anything written previous to A.D. 1900 was useless.

Attached to this hubris was the very strong tendency of the method to doubt the existence of miracles. The usual explanation given was that the miracles in scripture were a literary device, like Tolkien might use magic, or just epic legends that have truth as myth might have it.

And worse (it seems to me), all claims the Lord made of His divinity were to be understood as later additions of the Church, not what He actually taught. St. John's Gospel then was suspect; more of a theological reflection than actual history.

Any seminarian who questioned this new dogma (like me) was hammered, badgered and even ridiculed. Not by everyone mind you, but by many. Once in a while the zealots went too far and spilled the beans, such as one of my professors who claimed, "We know far more about the scriptures than Jesus ever did." The backlash was strong at this, and he apologized to the next class and said he went too far. But what he said (besides being flat-out blasphemy) was consistent with the pride that normally accompanied this method of study.

If we wish to preserve the Rite of St. Gregory, we must learn from the past. The future is always in the past, and to be ignorant of it is a thing of peril. That is, many Catholics in the 1960's were assured that the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council meant the best; that Latin would be retained, that tradition would stay intact. There were only to be a few changes to the liturgical calendar, saying the collect from the sedile, a small increase of the vernacular regarding the reading of scripture and so on. When Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre heard of these changes he voted in favor of them at the Council. And people thought at the time "We are safe. The Council wants to retain Latin and Chant."

But what happened is that the Council was simply ignored, by-passed, and rendered irrelevant. All that talk in the document on the liturgy called *Sacrosanctum Concilium* about the primacy of Latin; of Gregorian Chant and so on...that is not the Mass in the typical parish of our time. It's not even close. The normal way the New Order of Mass is celebrated has almost no connection to what was voted for at Vatican II.

Catholics of traditional sympathy back then thought that the Papal Bull *Quo Primum* would protect the traditional rite of Mass. A bull by the way is a type of public decree from a pope, named after the lead seal (bulla in Latin) which was appended to the end of the document in order to authenticate it. That Bull is in every altar missal that we use as a kind of preface. It is easy to understand why Catholics thought this document would protect the Mass. It is easy to understand why people still think that. Here is just one example:

Furthermore, by these presents, in virtue of Our Apostolic authority, We grant and concede in perpetuity that, for the chanting or reading of the Mass in any church whatsoever, this Missal is hereafter to be followed absolutely, without any scruple of

conscience or fear of incurring any penalty, judgment, or censure, and may freely and lawfully be used. Nor are superiors, administrators, canons, chaplains, and other secular priests, or religious, of whatever title designated, obliged to celebrate the Mass otherwise than as enjoined by Us. We likewise declare and ordain that no one whosoever is forced or coerced to alter this Missal, and that this present document cannot be revoked or modified, but remain always valid and retain its full force notwithstanding the previous constitutions and decrees of the Holy See, as well as any general or special constitutions or edicts of provincial or synodal councils, and notwithstanding the practice and custom of the aforesaid churches, established by long and immemorial prescription – except, however, if more than two hundred years' standing.

Seems like it's case closed doesn't it? The language is clear, concise, pointed and very strong. But if anyone thinks the pope can't go against this, just watch him. Pope St. Paul VI disregarded *Quo Primum*, and so can present and future popes. At this point then, we need an understanding of how the Mass was lost the last time, so we can resist it being taken away another time.

So what happened? Think of a perfect storm, a combination of various factors all working together to take the Rite of St. Gregory away. And think of these not in a particular order such as a chronological order, but more or less simultaneous, starting with seminary formation.

If you look at a course catalogue of the typical seminary in 1928, '38, '48 and '58, what will you see regarding the study of the sacred liturgy? You will see the liturgy mentioned in just one area, that of moral theology. Sounds odd doesn't it? But it was put there because the only thing they were really studying about it then had to do with the *defectibus*; the faults and mistakes and the things that could