

Some Questions about the Rites

I received some questions about the different rites of Mass from two exemplary Catholics, whose obvious desire is to be faithful, loyal Catholics. Since the questions were so good, and since I only briefly explained some answers to them, I thought I'd share this with the parishioners in case they had some of the same questions.

Q. We had the opportunity to experience both the Tridentine Mass and the *Novus Ordo* Mass done properly and well. Given that and also what you were saying in some of your homilies regarding the need during this time in our Church to "keep the Mass," it raised some questions in my mind. One question I have is your thoughts on doing the *Novus Ordo* Mass well?

A. Basically, doing it "well" is a great idea. But there is no agreement among the priests or the hierarchy as to what that means. In the eight different dioceses I've served in, the priests disagreed so much about how to "do" the liturgy that they never talked about it as a group. It's just too divisive of a subject. They talked about it privately of course, in groups where they thought alike, but not as a presbyterate.

Just the subject of music seems insurmountable. Each episcopal conference was supposed to come up with a directory of catechism and a directory of music with the promulgation of the new rite. Pope St. Paul VI came up with the *Jubilare Deo* (a small book of chants that everyone was supposed to know), to be the usual book of music for the universal church. But almost no Catholics even know about it. I've never even heard of a parish which has it. And after 50 years there is no directory for music (there is for catechism) for the same problem as above: the clergy and the bishops cannot agree what is the right music is for the new rite.

And as to the style of celebration, that too is all over the place. It's as though the new rite isn't a rite, but a collection of rites. This parish over here uses puppets and guitars, and that parish over there uses the organ with hymns and has only altar boys.

Q. Do you think that if more attention was paid to doing the *Novus Ordo* Mass better (in those parishes where it is bad) whether more people would be inclined to *accept* the Tridentine form or even to just keep the Mass better?

A. Perhaps you're right. But I don't know of any evidence to that effect. In fact, those most devoted to the new rite are often the same ones most opposed to the old, as opposed to liberals who are quite open to the old rite. It's rather counter-intuitive!

Q. Where I went to college we had both Tridentine and *Novus Ordo* Masses at the Chapel and they did a good job of doing both forms beautifully and properly. Because both

were done well, we came to have a balanced appreciation for both forms. Would you say that the Mass can be kept if both Tridentine and *Novus Ordo* each are done in a way that is beautiful and proper?

A. You would think so. That seems very logical to me. But priests who celebrate the new rite very well (here I mean with great reverence) can be ostracized from their brethren, and often are. If a priest (even a pastor) wants to celebrate *ad orientem*, then he might be able to get away with one Mass a week say, but his bishop will not back him, even if the bishop is sympathetic. The faithful have been taught for 50 years that worshipping with "the priest's back to the people" is utterly unacceptable. It doesn't matter that Pope Benedict was in favor of *ad orientem* worship, or great cardinals like Cardinal Sarah. It is simply rejected by many if not most Catholics in the new rite. So again, there is no agreement on what is beautiful and proper in this regard.

I think that those so bitterly opposed to the old rite - such as the Holy Father - are indifferent to how well it is celebrated. The problem for them is the rite itself, not how it is celebrated. Their opposition is based on theology, not performance.

Q. I agree that most *Novus Ordo* Masses are done poorly, but if a *Novus Ordo* Mass is done poorly, that does not make it invalid, correct?

A. I don't know that most are done poorly; it's not something I say or hold, but perhaps that is true. At any rate, you're correct. Poor celebration (whatever form that takes) does not invalidate.

Q. Yes, it does not help spiritually deepen the people, and thus tends towards not helping keep the Mass, but it seems that if a *Novus Ordo* Mass is done right as I experienced in college, that it should help towards keeping the Mass. Do you think that the Mass could be maintained by keeping both forms done properly, especially if more parishes worked harder on fixing the way they do the *Novus Ordo*?

A. Perhaps. I just don't know. One of the problems is that a priest might work hard to "fix" the way the new rite is celebrated, but then he is transferred and the next priest has an entirely different idea about how to say Mass. I've seen this over and over. Or, if a priest can stay for some time, he can still run afoul of the diocesan liturgy office which has the full backing of the bishop. But I remember a bishop railing at me over this, and his point was that the theology of the Masses was different, and that was the crux of the issue, not the style of celebration. It was especially the "old, outdated theology of the Tridentine" that for him was the problem. This was many years ago, and I didn't agree with him at the

time, but I do now. It is especially the theology that is the sticking point.

Q. One priest I was once talking to thought that more people would be reached and the intention to keep the Mass during the times of the Church now would better be served if the *Novus Ordo* Masses were done more properly than they are; maybe he thought that so many people/Catholics nowadays need a starting point before they, with the shallow places that they are, understand and appreciate the beauty of the Tridentine form? After all, one's growth/knowledge is always according to the state/mode of their reception and if a starting point is needed for people to understand and appreciate the Mass and keep it, they might have a better starting point in *Novus Ordo* Masses done well? Thoughts?

A. He might be right, and I think he is to some extent. On the whole however, priests and bishops have done a good job indoctrinating people that Latin should not be used, since the faithful don't understand it. They accept one of the founding principles of the new rite, which is that the rite must be immediately understandable without explanation. So in that sense, the new rite - no matter how celebrated - would not be a preparation for the old.

Q. What we are thinking of is more *Novus Ordo* Masses where Gregorian chant is the main music, organ is used, incense is used, boy/men altar servers only, no clapping/sign of peace, no distracting announcements after communion, more Latin incorporated, etc. where these measures help draw in more Catholics to a greater appreciation and love of the sacred.)

A. Yes, I agree with this point in theory, but in practice it is not possible except in rare circumstances like some very solid Catholic colleges. There is not one parish in this Archdiocese that has the new rite in Latin. There have been a number of attempts (or so I've heard), but all have failed. As to the parishes which have what I would call reverent Masses in the new rite, they are not feeder parishes for the old rite. People come to the old for very different reasons. And any pastor who tries to use too much Gregorian chant (too much defined as more than two pieces) will face much wrath from the congregation.

Q. Another question I have: could you give me a clearer understanding of the difference between the FSSP and the SSPX? One of the things that I have heard regarding the SSPX is that they think the Tridentine Mass is the only valid form of the Mass and hence they are not in communion with the Pope. (Is this the correct understanding?) However, some of the people I have known who go to FSSP parishes have given me an impression that comes across like the SSPX...that they think that the Tridentine Mass is the only Mass one "should" go to nowadays as though it is bad to go to a well done *Novus Ordo* Mass.

A. The SSPX has for an official position that the new rite is valid. Their communion with Rome exists, but it is damaged. Rome has characterized their position as canonically "irregular." But the Holy See has not judged them to be *de jure*

schismatic. The FSSP is in full canonical union with the Holy See.

There is no monolithic thought or thoughts which traditional Catholics hold, nor is there for new rite Catholics. Both are all over the place. A large majority of new rite Catholics (if I may use that phrase) think that one should never go to the old Mass. A minority (substantial) of traditional Catholics think that one should not go to the new Mass. But the great majority of my parishioners regularly go to the new Mass, especially on vacation or bad weather, etc. Yet they prefer the old.

Q. In general, I want to strike a balance regarding our approach to the Mass. I don't want to have a "better than thou" attitude to one form or the other, even if they are done well. Such an attitude doesn't help toward "keeping the Mass." We have experienced many times the cold shoulders that both Tridentine and *Novus Ordo* "groups" give to each other as though they each think their form is better than the other, and we don't want to fall into that boat.

A. In my experience, even if I bend over backwards to be charitable or supportive to those who prefer the new rites, it makes little difference. The very fact that I don't concelebrate the new Mass is received as a rejection, that I think I'm better. That's partially true, in that yes, I do think the modern rite of concelebration is very flawed. But I don't think I'm better.

And in my opinion, attitudes about the Mass will not have any effect over the long run as to keeping the old Mass. I think there is no way around it; to keep it, we must fight for it.

And if you look deeper into the reasons for the dislike that traditional Catholics have for the new rite, you'll find often that it isn't really the Mass that causes the attitude. It's often the culture surrounding the Mass: communion in the hand, bad music, altar girls, ugly churches, Eucharistic ministers, talking loud in churches, strange sermons. These things are not really the new Mass, but they may as well be, since that is often the experience that parishioners have when they attend the new Mass.