

Millennial

Young Catholics, An Ancient Faith, A New Century

The Latin Mass Is Not the Key to the New Evangelization

OCTOBER 31, 2014 GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

In July of 2007, Pope Benedict issued the Apostolic Letter *Summorum Pontificum*, which allowed priests to celebrate mass in the Tridentine Rite, or the Traditional Latin Mass. Benedict noted that “what was sacred for prior generations, remains sacred and great for us as well, and cannot be suddenly prohibited altogether or even judged harmful.” And thus, a new movement was born. According to *The Week’s* Michael Brendan Dougherty, “In 1988, there were 20 regularly scheduled and diocesan-approved Latin Masses in the United States. After *Summorum Pontificum*, there are now more than 500.”

Benedict’s decision to loosen the restrictions on the Latin Mass greatly enhanced the religious devotion of many Catholics. Latin Mass Catholics often partake in frequent confession, fasts, feasts days, and adoration.

Summorum Pontificum has also created—unfortunately and unintentionally—a subculture of young Catholics skeptical of contemporary Catholicism and the reforms of Vatican II. They’ve grown to appreciate the Latin Mass and traditional Catholicism, and now feel as though it is the only way mass should be celebrated.

A noticeable number of Millennial Catholics even believe the Ordinary Form (or the *Novus Ordo*) is actually inferior to the Traditional Latin Mass. These TLM Millennials, as we might call them, are not sedevacantists, nor are they members the Society of St. Pius X. They are far more mainstream. But they are obsessed with tradition (with a little t) and skeptical of liturgical reform, which is to say, they are skeptical of Vatican II, as the liturgical changes of Vatican II are fundamental to understanding everything that came out of the council.

I appreciate TLM Millennials as strong advocates for better adherence to Catholic teaching, whether it’s fasting before mass, showing more reverence towards communion, or engaging in regular confession. But their views on the liturgy, and reform in general, are misguided and

threaten to intensify divisions within the Church. Whether they realize it or not, TLM Millennials are not on the side of orthodox Catholicism. They are at odds with the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Sam Guzman, the author of the popular “Catholic Gentleman” blog, is a TLM Millennial. He believes the Ordinary Form is to be blamed for church decline: “Parishes used to be packed with men who saw the mass as something masculine, inspiring, and something worth sacrificing time for. A few decades later, most parish masses are dominated by women.” Setting aside his claims about gender roles in the liturgy, Guzman blames the “*Novus Ordo*,” poor liturgical music, the switch from *ad orientem*, the lack of Latin, and communion in the hand for making the Catholic mass less appealing to men.*

Guzman should realize that his harsh indictment of the Ordinary Form puts him at odds with Church teaching. The liturgical renewal came about after the Church—no longer a primarily European institution existing in the age of medieval Christendom—realized that the Tridentine form made it hard to evangelize and communicate with the modern world. For TLM Millennials, their personal preference for an older form of the mass is overriding the Church’s essential outreach efforts. It shouldn’t come to a surprise to Guzman, given his claimed expertise in this area, that most men may not be interested in attending an hour-long mass in a language they don’t understand.

The consensus on liturgical reform during Vatican II was extremely high. *Summorum Pontificum* merely allowed the old form to be celebrated, but not compete against the Ordinary Form. But many young Catholics have misunderstood and begun to believe the documents of Vatican II are optional. Perhaps they lack a proper education on the theological reasons for liturgical reform, but instead are drawn in by the bizarre rants of publications like *Rorate Caeli* and *The Remnant*.

Some observers see the popularity of the Latin Mass among Millennials as nothing but a fad, but it’s more than that. The same poor catechesis that leads Catholics to misunderstand and oppose the church’s teaching on hot button cultural issues also lead Catholics to oppose the reforms of the past half century. A lack of proper education is at the root of both.

Anyone interested in seeing the Catholic faith thrive in the world, rather than be ignored, should be concerned about a generation of Catholics who oppose reforms that the vast majority of Cardinals supported 50 years ago. There is a place in the Church for the Latin Mass, but those who find it so attractive would be wise to have respect for Vatican II and recognize the opportunities that now exist as we engage in the new evangelization.

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**Updated for greater clarity (11/3/14)*

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