

Moving Forward with Liturgical Reform: Positive Steps

The extensive history and genesis of the liturgical reforms following the Second Vatican Council obviously could be approached from different angles.¹ One possible view sees them as twofold: (A) moving away from a “Low Mass” culture; and (B) encouraging the congregation to take a greater role in the liturgy, for instance, by a greater emphasis on congregational singing (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Art. 30).

Perhaps as a way of ensuring liturgical singing even in very small Churches, a “loophole” was written into Church law² in the late 1960’s permitting the Mass Propers (staggeringly ancient and essential components of the Roman Rite) to be replaced by *alius cantus aptus* (“anything else appropriate,” as Dobszay renders the expression). As readers of HPR may know, this permission led to the complete abandonment of the Mass Propers. Not one in a hundred Catholic churches now sings the Propers, but instead replaces them³ with songs selected practically at random each week. The confusion even caused the Bishop’s Committee on Divine worship to make several elementary errors⁴ in this regard in 2001. A decade elapsed before corrections were made in the 2011 edition of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (G.I.R.M.). I say this not by way of criticism, but as a means of pointing out the obstacles which must be overcome.⁵

However, the Ordinary Form allows for many options. When certain options are chosen, Ordinary Form Masses can actually resemble the Extraordinary Form to a surprising degree:

- (A) The entire Ordinary Form Mass can be celebrated in Latin.
- (B) The priest can celebrate *ad orientem*.
- (C) The priest can use the Roman Canon (identical with the Extraordinary Form Canon, except for twenty words).
- (D) The *Proprium Missae* (Mass Propers) are nearly identical for most Sundays.
- (E) The Ordinary parts (*Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus*) are identical.
- (F) Clerics or men in cassock and surplice could chant the readings (in Latin).
- (G) The “Sign of Peace” (which has become quite a distraction) is not required.
- (H) The Canon could be said silently (a practice⁶ becoming more common).

Furthermore, there is nothing to stop the priest from praying Psalm 42 as preparation⁷ (perhaps in the sacristy with the servers) nor the Last Gospel as thanksgiving (perhaps silently during

1 The author acknowledges that concise treatment of such a complex subject will often leave much to be desired.

2 László Dobszay, “The Chants of the Proprium Missae versus Alius Cantus Aptus,” *Sacred Music* 130:3 (Fall 2003): 5-25.

3 Technically, there is no such thing as an *Entrance Hymn, Offertory Hymn, or Communion Hymn*. The 2011 G.I.R.M. calls for the *Proprium Missae* (Mass Propers): *Entrance chant, Offertory chant, and Communion chant*, but we have so consistently replaced them with “anything else appropriate” that we no longer remember what we are replacing!

4 On this, see the following: (A) Christoph Tietze, “Graduale or Missale: The Confusion Resolved,” *Sacred Music* 133:4 (Winter 2006): 4-12; (B) Exchange of letters between Paul Monachino (*Conference of Roman Catholic Cathedral Musicians*) on 3 March 2009 and Most Reverend Bishop Arthur J. Serratelli on 19 May 2009; and (C) Jeffrey Ostrowski, *Antiphons in the Roman Missal vs. the Roman Gradual*, January 2012 [http://www.ccwatershed.org/Roman_Missal/].

5 The Church has seen many liturgical crises over the last 2,000 years and always ends up renewing herself in the end. For example, the Church overcame Gallicanism, which had attempted “to lower the Liturgy, hitherto regarded as a monument of Tradition, to the level of a merely human document which everyone was free to criticise and alter according to his taste” in the words of Dom Baudot. I would suggest that the Church has to overcome a very similar notion in our times.

6 C.f. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (Ignatius Press, 2000), Chapter 3.

7 Some have commented that the “dialogue Mass” in the Extraordinary Form somewhat obscured the nature of this preparatory psalm. On this, c.f. Clifford Howell, SJ, “Parish in the Life of the Church,” *Living Parish Week* (Sydney: Pellegrini, 1958).

the exit procession⁸). Obviously, many of the Offertory prayers would be missing (since the post-Conciliar liturgy went back to the tenth century practice, which many consider a rupture). Then, too, there is an extra reading, which usually does not occur in the Extraordinary Form. These differences may diminish with time, as “mutual enrichment” takes place.

Monsignor Schmitt, former President of the CMAA, claimed that “traditionalist” Catholics would not be able to differentiate between an Ordinary Form Mass like this and the Extraordinary Form.⁹ While I would never make such a claim, especially in the derogatory manner Schmitt used, I do maintain that many traditionalists would be amazed at the similarities.¹⁰ Quite recently, I was speaking to a priest who offers the Extraordinary Form exclusively, and he was astonished when I explained that the Propers were never forbidden in the post-Conciliar liturgy. Without pretending, then, that Ordinary and Extraordinary are identical¹¹, I merely stress that many differences are the result of choices made by the priest (or, frankly, whoever happens to be “running” the liturgy!).

Forty-seven years after the close of the Second Vatican Council, however, the fact remains that the liturgy described above is a mere theoretical possibility.¹² It is not the norm, no matter how much some of us might wish it to be.

Before I suggest a way to move forward with liturgical reform, let us quickly look at a “typical” liturgical situation in the Ordinary Form.¹³ The *Proprium Missae* are never sung, and if you showed the musician an *Introit*, he would probably look at you with a blank expression on his face. The songs are chosen by the musician: in other words, whatever song he “feels like” performing on a given day. Sometimes the songs are also suggested by the Pastor, who will often use a false criterion.¹⁴ Most of the songs are written in a secular style (Broadway, Disney, etc.) and composed with heavy emphasis on rhythm and highly emotional melodies. As we all know, the lyrics are usually quite trivial and (occasionally) heretical. None of the melodies are inspired by Gregorian chant (as Pope John Paul II reminded us¹⁵ they all should be), and the parts the congregation is to join in singing are either too difficult (rhythmically and melodically) or insipid in a way that makes each person feel silly to join in the singing. After Communion, there might be some sort of performance, and the much-abused congregation cannot help but view it as a “concert” (rather than liturgical prayer). Due to the constant variation in words¹⁶ and melodies, as well as the forcing of liturgical prayers to fit secular, rhythmic music, no one even realizes the function that each chant is supposed to have at Mass, and this is certainly not the fault of the congregation.

8 As in the Extraordinary Form during certain Pontifical Masses.

9 Francis P. Schmitt, *Church Music Transgressed* (The Seabury Press, 1977), 3.

10 It is possible that traditionalists familiar only with a Low Mass would, perhaps, consider certain things in the Ordinary Form as innovation. An example would be Liturgy of the Word not taking place at the altar with the celebrant doing the readings, but rather *in choro*, analogously to what happens at a Pontifical Mass (or Vespers) in the Extraordinary Form.

11 At the risk of redundancy, let me be quite clear that major differences exist between the Extraordinary and Ordinary Form: but the scope of this article does not allow for discussion of these.

12 For instance, most Ordinary Form priests do not even possess a Latin Lectionary (they are incredibly expensive) and lack the familiarity with Latin required for a Latin Liturgy of the Word, though I would submit that many are fully capable of praying the Mass Ordinary in Latin.

13 I will not here describe the “worst of the worst” scenarios, since we all know what those are. Furthermore, in my part of the country, we have jazz Masses, Polka Masses, mariachi Masses, rock Masses, praise & worship Masses, etc. I will not be considering these, either.

14 As László Dobszay pointed out, the criteria are often: “Our people like it”; “This congregation favors it”; “The song is fitting for this age group”; and so on.

15 Pope John Paul II, *Chirograph of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II for the Centenary of the Motu Proprio “Tra le Sollecitudini,”* 22 November 2003.

16 The substitution of texts is often explicitly forbidden by Church authorities, but widespread disobedience abounds, even in major cathedrals and basilicas.

To be fair, the pre-Conciliar liturgical experience was also poor in some Churches. First-hand witnesses have told me that the priests often mumbled the prayers quickly at Low Mass, and many people did not have Missals to follow along. This led in some instances to a situation where the congregation did not *know* what was happening, and therefore could not *pray* the Mass. I was astonished to learn recently that the “four hymn sandwich”¹⁷ was alive and well long before the Council.

How, then, can we move forward? We want to pray, understand, and love the Mass. We do not want silly, secular songs at Mass. Yet, we are sensitive to the words of Pope Benedict XVI: “Nothing is more harmful to the liturgy than constant changes, even if it seems to be for the sake of genuine renewal.”

Corpus Christi Watershed’s *Vatican II Hymnal* is a new publication allowing many parishes to move forward with genuine reform. Outlined below is what a “typical” Mass using the *Vatican II Hymnal* might look like. The pastorally minded will notice that it does not represent a radical departure from common practice (which is a sure-fire way to upset parishioners!). Notice how it is an eminently *balanced* approach: congregational singing, but not too much; priest, deacon, and choir chanting, but not too much; organ accompaniment, but not too much; polyphony, but not too much; strophic hymnody, and so forth . . . but not too much!

1. Before Mass, a Hymn with organ accompaniment is sung in its entirety. Singing only a few verses of a hymn destroys its inherent poetry¹⁸ and frustrates parishioners, who have gone to the trouble of taking out the books and finding the correct page only to stop singing after the second or third verse. Since parishioners are accustomed to singing an opening hymn, taking it away would cause a needless rupture, hence it is sung immediately before Mass begins.

2. As the priest processes to the altar and then uses incense, the Proper¹⁹ is sung. As a reminder, the Proper is the ancient prayer, carefully attached to each individual Mass for the procession. It can be sung in many ways, but one way would be the *Simple English Propers*.

3. The congregation sings the responses as the priest sings, “In the name of the Father,” etc. Incidentally, throughout the entire Mass, the entire congregation sings the responses

4. The cantor sings *Kyrie Eleison* (a cappella) to a simple chant, the congregation repeats, then a 20-second polyphonic verset is sung by the choir. The same arrangement follows for the “Christe” and final “Kyrie.” One possibility would be the Joan Brudieu (†1591) version.

5. The entire congregation sings a simple, short, beautiful, chant-inspired setting of the “Glory to God” in English (with organ accompaniment). The *Gloria in honor of St. Edmund Arrowsmith* would fit the bill.²⁰

6. The Responsorial Psalm is sung with organ accompaniment, to a simple melody based on Gregorian chant. More than 2,000 are available for free on the *St. Noël Chabanel Responsorial Psalms* website. The Gospel acclamation is done the same way, and could come from the *St. Charles Garnier Gospel Acclamations* website.

7. The Offertory Proper is sung *a cappella* by the choir, and (as always with Propers) is repeated as many times as is necessary to cover what is happening at the Altar. If there is incense, an *a cappella* polyphonic Motet could be sung.

17 Four vernacular hymns (Entrance, Offertory, Communion, Exit) sung at Low Mass.

18 It is like reading the first few chapters of a book, but not the conclusion.

19 In this case, the *Introit*, sometimes called the “Entrance chant.”

20 Note the “progression” here. Had the reverse been done (the *Kyrie* accompanied with organ and the *Gloria* sung *a cappella*) the congregation would feel as if something were “missing.”

8. The Preface should be sung by the priest, but not the Eucharistic prayer.²¹
9. The *Sanctus*, *Mystery of Faith*, and *Great Amen* are sung to simple chant-inspired melodies with organ accompaniment. The *Mass in honor of St. Anne Line* would work well.
10. The *Our Father* is sung with one of several beautiful organ accompaniments provided, to enhance what is a very well-known and loved chant.
11. The *Agnus Dei* is sung in Latin *a cappella*, intoned by the cantor each time, and continued by the congregation. The final two words are sung in polyphony, similar to the *Kyrie* (indeed the same polyphonic music can be used).
12. During Communion, the Proper is sung *a cappella* by the choir. After Communion, a congregational hymn is sung in its entirety, accompanied by organ.²²
13. At the end of Mass, a hymn is sung by the congregation with organ accompaniment.

Obviously, the above model is not “set in stone.” For example, the organist could play an interlude during the Offertory. The *Gradual* or *Tract* could be sung instead of the Responsorial Psalm. The traditional *Introit* could be sung in Latin, or employ an even simple arrangement (such as the *Simple English Psalm Tones*). But the beauty of the above recommendation is that it *balances* the Mass in a very pastoral way, and I must admit to having a new sensitivity in this area since my wife and I became parents.

The *Vatican II Hymnal* makes implementation of such a program very easy:

1. It is the only pew book ever printed to contain the complete Mass Propers (*Introit*, *Gradual*, *Alleluia*, *Offertory*, *Communion*) with Latin incipit for all Sundays and major feasts, Years ABC. These are laid out in a “user-friendly” way that requires no page turning, and this is essential when we consider the current lack of familiarity with Propers.
2. It contains the complete readings for Years ABC (Sundays and Holy Days), again, in a very “user-friendly” manner, with no page turns.
3. It contains 100+ pages of Mass settings (*Roman Missal, 3rd Edition*), all of which are approved for liturgical use in the United States by the Bishops’ Conference. They are simple settings in Latin and English.
4. It contains beautiful, traditional, well-loved hymns, with more 100+ pages of Communion hymns.
5. It contains the complete Mass Ordinary for both Forms of the Mass (Latin and English), all the sung parts of the Mass, Motet translations, the complete Responsorial Psalms, Gospel Acclamations and more.
6. More than 6,000 free PDF’s, organ accompaniments, and practice videos are provided online for free, and more are added each day.

Each parish is different and has its own needs and considerations. I have very little patience for people who sit in an armchair and “hypothesize” about what the liturgy should resemble. All the reflections I have shared above come from personal experience as a parish musician . . . and

21 Some will strongly disagree with this recommendation. However, two arguments *against* singing the Eucharistic Prayer are worthy of consideration: (a) From a pastoral perspective, its length and somewhat monotonous melody can strain the attention span of some parishioners; (b) it is not traditional—throughout the whole history of the Roman Rite, it was never sung.

22 This is the only time the G.I.R.M. uses the word “hymnus” to describe what should be sung during Mass. The G.I.R.M. seems to favor congregational singing at this point, and my experience has been that it works much better for the congregation to sing here, rather than during the reception of Holy Communion. *Distributione Communionis expleta, pro opportunitate sacerdos et fideles per aliquod temporis spatium secreto orant. Si placet, etiam psalmus vel aliud laudis canticum vel hymnus a tota congregatione persolvi potest.* “When the distribution of Communion is over, if appropriate, the Priest and faithful pray quietly for some time. If desired, a Psalm or other canticle of praise or a hymn may also be sung by the whole congregation.” (2011 edition, *General Instruction for the Roman Missal*, §88)

many mistakes! For instance, my advice regarding following the G.I.R.M. recommendation for the post-Communion hymn may seem bizarre, but “the proof is in the pudding.”

A closing anecdote: I never use a hymn at the Offertory, because doing so is simply too much hymn-singing at Mass. Instead, we sing the Proper, a polyphonic motet, or I play organ. I recently spoke to the organist of a major Cathedral who agrees with my supposition . . . but for a completely different reason, namely a study that “proved” people do not put as much money in the basket when they are busy singing a hymn!