

CHANGES IN MASS FOR GREATER APOSTOLATE

Pope Paul VI

Address to a General Audience, November 26, 1969

Our Dear Sons and Daughters:

1. We ask you to turn your minds once more to the liturgical innovation of the new rite of the Mass. This new rite will be introduced into our celebration of the holy Sacrifice starting from Sunday next which is the first of Advent, November 30 [in Italy].

2. A new rite of the Mass: a change in a venerable tradition that has gone on for centuries. This is something that affects our hereditary religious patrimony, which seemed to enjoy the privilege of being untouchable and settled. It seemed to bring the prayer of our forefathers and our saints to our lips and to give us the comfort of feeling faithful to our spiritual past, which we kept alive to pass it on to the generations ahead.

3. It is at such a moment as this that we get a better understanding of the value of historical tradition and the communion of the saints. This change will affect the ceremonies of the Mass. We shall become aware, perhaps with some feeling of annoyance, that the ceremonies at the altar are no longer being carried out with the same words and gestures to which we were accustomed—perhaps so much accustomed that we no longer took any notice of them. This change also touches the faithful. It is intended to interest each one of those present, to draw them out of their customary personal devotions or their usual torpor.

4. We must prepare for this many-sided inconvenience. It is the kind of upset caused by every novelty that breaks in on our habits. We shall notice that pious persons are disturbed most, because they have their own respectable way of hearing Mass, and they will feel shaken out of their usual thoughts and obliged to follow those of others. Even priests may feel some annoyance in this respect.

5. So what is to be done on this special and historical occasion? First of all, we must prepare ourselves. This novelty is no small thing. We should not let ourselves be surprised by the nature, or even the nuisance, of its exterior forms. As intelligent persons and conscientious faithful we should find out as much as we can about this innovation. It will not be hard to do so, because of the many fine efforts being made by the Church and by publishers. As We said on another occasion, we shall do well to take into account the motives for this grave change. The first is obedience to the Council. That obedience now implies obedience to the Bishops, who interpret the Council's prescription and put them into practice.

6. This first reason is not simply canonical—relating to an external precept. It is connected with the charism of the liturgical act. In other words, it is linked with the power and efficacy of the Church's prayer, the most authoritative utterance of which comes from the Bishop. This is also true of priests, who help the Bishop in his ministry, and like him act in persona Christi (cf. St. Ign., ad Eph. I, V). It is Christ's will, it is the breath of the Holy Spirit which calls the Church to make this change. A prophetic moment is occurring in the mystical body of Christ, which is the Church.

This moment is shaking the Church, arousing it, obliging it to renew the mysterious art of its prayer.

7. The other reason for the reform is this renewal of prayer. It is aimed at associating the assembly of the faithful more closely and more effectively with the official rite, that of the Word and that of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, that constitutes the Mass. For the faithful are also invested with the "royal priesthood"; that is, they are qualified to have supernatural conversation with God.

8. It is here that the greatest newness is going to be noticed, the newness of language. No longer Latin, but the spoken language will be the principal language of the Mass. The introduction of the vernacular will certainly be a great sacrifice for those who know the beauty, the power and the expressive sacrality of Latin. We are parting with the speech of the Christian centuries; we are becoming like profane intruders in the literary preserve of sacred utterance. We will lose a great part of that stupendous and incomparable artistic and spiritual thing, the Gregorian chant.

9. We have reason indeed for regret, reason almost for bewilderment. What can we put in the place of that language of the angels? We are giving up something of priceless worth. But why? What is more precious than these loftiest of our Church's values?

10. The answer will seem banal, prosaic. Yet it is a good answer, because it is human, because it is apostolic.

11. Understanding of prayer is worth more than the silken garments in which it is royally dressed. Participation by the people is worth more—particularly participation by modern people, so fond of plain language which is easily understood and converted into everyday speech.

12. If the divine Latin language kept us apart from the children, from youth, from the world of labor and of affairs, if it were a dark screen, not a clear window, would it be right for us fishers of souls to maintain it as the exclusive language of prayer and religious intercourse? What did St. Paul have to say about that? Read chapter 14 of the first letter to the Corinthians: "In Church I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue" (I Corinthians 14:19).

13. St. Augustine seems to be commenting on this when he says, "Have no fear of teachers, so long as all are instructed" (P.L. 38, 228, Serm. 37; cf. also Serm. 229, p. 1371). But, in any case, the new rite of the Mass provides that the faithful "should be able to sing together, in Latin, at least the parts of the Ordinary of the Mass, especially the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father" (Sacrosanctum Concilium n. 19).

14. But, let us bear this well in mind, for our counsel and our comfort: the Latin language will not thereby disappear. It will continue to be the noble language of the Holy See's official acts; it will remain as the means of teaching in ecclesiastical studies and as the key to the patrimony of our religious, historical and human culture. If possible, it will reflourish in splendor.

15. Finally, if we look at the matter properly we shall see that the fundamental outline of the Mass is still the traditional one, not only theologically but also spiritually.

Indeed, if the rite is carried out as it ought to be, the spiritual aspect will be found to have greater richness. The greater simplicity of the ceremonies, the variety and abundance of scriptural texts, the joint acts of the ministers, the silences which will mark various deeper moments in the rite, will all help to bring this out.

16. But two indispensable requirements above all will make that richness clear: a profound participation by every single one present, and an outpouring of spirit in community charity. These requirements will help to make the Mass more than ever a school of spiritual depth and a peaceful but demanding school of Christian sociology. The soul's relationship with Christ and with the brethren thus attains new and vital intensity. Christ, the victim and the priest, renews and offers up his redeeming sacrifice through the ministry of the Church in the symbolic rite of his last supper. He leaves us his body and blood under the appearances of bread and wine, for our personal and spiritual nourishment, for our fusion in the unity of his redeeming love and his immortal life.

17. But there is still a practical difficulty, which the excellence of the sacred renders not a little important. How can we celebrate this new rite when we have not yet got a complete missal, and there are still so many uncertainties about what to do?

18. To conclude, it will be helpful to read to you some directions from the competent office, namely the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship. Here they are: "As regards the obligation of the rite:

1) For the Latin text: Priests who celebrate in Latin, in private or also in public, in cases provided for by the legislation, may use either the Roman Missal or the new rite until November 28, 1971. If they use the Roman Missal, they may nevertheless make use of the three new anaphoras and the Roman Canon, having regard to the provisions respecting the last text (omission of some saints, conclusions, etc.). They may moreover recite the readings and the prayer of the faithful in the vernacular. If they use the new rite, they must follow the official text, with the concessions as regards the vernacular indicated above.

2) For the vernacular text. In Italy, all those who celebrate in the presence of the people from November 30 next, must use the Rito della Messa published by the Italian Episcopal Conference or by another National Conference. On feast days readings shall be taken: either from the Lectionary published by the Italian Center for Liturgical Action, or from the Roman Missal for feast days, as in use heretofore. On ferial days the ferial Lectionary published three years ago shall continue to be used. No problem arises for those who celebrate in private, because they must celebrate in Latin. If a priest celebrates in the vernacular by special indult, as regards the texts, he shall follow what was said above for the Mass with the people; but for the rite he shall follow the Ordo published by the Italian Episcopal Conference.

19. In every case, and at all times, let us remember that "the Mass is a Mystery to be lived in a death of Love. Its divine reality surpasses all words. . . It is the Action par excellence, the very act of our Redemption, in the Memorial which makes it present" (Zundel).

With Our Apostolic Benediction.

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