

Gotta Sing Gotta Pray

MONDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2013

Mass in the Extraordinary Form

Monday greetings, folks. Hold onto your seats . . . this is a long one.

As many who follow this blog know, I am a Catholic in search of a parish these days.

Yesterday, I decided that, after talking about the pre-Vatican II Mass for years, it might be a good idea to attend a Mass in the extraordinary form, a "Tridentine Mass."

I am going to spend the time on the blog this week talking about my experience. I hope that we can have a civil dialogue about this issue.

The parish's web site described the particular Mass as "Tridentine High Mass (Latin)." I was looking forward to a Mass filled with music and chant and the glorious sounds of the organ and choir.

Apparently, there was a change in the parish schedule and, from all accounts, what I experienced instead was a "Tridentine Low Mass (Latin)."

There were about 150 people in attendance. I would say that perhaps ten people were over 65. The rest were fairly young; people in their 30's, 40's and 50's. I have probably said hundreds of times over the years something like this: "The pre-conciliar liturgy was generally marked by a passivity by the congregation. The priest, for the most part, had his back to the congregation and prayed the Mass in a low voice, inaudible to the people. What was important was going on 'up there' in the sanctuary. People in the pews, for the most part, engaged in private devotions and at the ringing of the bells, knew to look up to see the elevation of host and chalice."

Yesterday's Mass fit my description to a tee, and more. There were two altar servers who assisted the priest at the Mass. They were robotic, mechanical, and militaristic in their movements. Whoever trained them for this trained them quite well. The many movements, all done with the precision of synchronized swimmers at the Olympics, was startling. When the Missal or a framed prayer card had to be moved by these servers from one side of the altar to the other, I sat there wondering why it looked like the changing of the guard at the tomb of the unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery. I know it sounds as if I am poking fun here, but this was so precise and like a military drill each time these servers made a move that it distracted

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me beyond measure from what I was trying to see going on at the altar. But that was just the strange point about it; I couldn't tell what was going on at the altar. The Mass was being said in a small space "up there." All of the dialogues were between the priest and these two servers. I tried following along in the booklet provided. I could recognize the various parts of the Mass; at least I think I could. But I was guessing and second-guessing throughout, because I couldn't see what the priest was actually doing at the altar, and I couldn't hear a word.

After the priest said the Gospel (I think) at the altar with his back to us, he turned and faced us and approached the ambo. From there he read the Epistle from Saint James in English. He then told a story about a saint and the need for people to sign up for the 40 hours of devotion before our "Eucharistic King."

He then went back to the altar, with his back to us and continued with the Mass. As he began what I knew must have been the words of institution, a man in front of me left his wife and two children and walked to my left. I was distracted because I heard him speaking out loud. When I looked to my left, I realized that he was kneeling at a confessional and going to confession. When he finished, a young boy knelt at the confessional and loudly confessed his sins. This was all occurring as the servers, kneeling behind the celebrant, lifted up the celebrant's chasuble as he elevated first the host, then the chalice, while the bells were rung three times. Confessions continued as the eucharistic prayer went on, both next to me and at a confessional on the other side of the church.

Just before communion, the two servers mechanically approached the altar rail and again, with perfect synchronicity, unfolded several long white cloths that were hung on the inside of the communion rail, then draped them over the top of the communion rail. They then opened the central gate of the communion rail. People went to communion, kneeling at the rail, receiving communion on the tongue. Several young men in cassocks and surplices of lace assisted with the distribution of Holy Communion.

The servers then folded the long white cloths back up behind the communion rail and closed the gate. During communion, no one went through the open gate. After an extended washing of the vessels, the Mass concluded, or so I thought.

Up until this point, the only word I had uttered the entire time was "Amen" when I received communion. As the Mass concluded, the people knelt and were led by the celebrant into praying three Hail Mary's, the Salve Regina in English, another Marian Prayer, and the Prayer to Saint Michael the Archangel. These were the only prayers that the congregation prayed aloud during the entire time we were there.

I left that Church feeling perplexed. I had a much deeper appreciation of why the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council insisted on a reform of the liturgy; less repetition of words; less repetition of ritual

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About Me and the Blog

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Dr. Jerry Galipeau is Vice President and Chief Publishing Officer at J. S. Paluch Company and its music and liturgy division, World Library Publications, located in Franklin Park, Illinois. Jerry presents keynotes and workshops throughout the United States and Canada on the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, liturgical spirituality, ritual music, evangelization, and adult spiritual formation. He earned the Doctor of Ministry with a concentration in liturgical studies from Catholic Theological Union

movements; a move into the vernacular; a move toward fully conscious and active participation by the people, among other reforms. What I witnessed yesterday was (I think) what the Fathers at the council were asking the Church to reform so that the work of Christ in the liturgy could become intelligible and more fully nurture the hearts of the faithful.

Summorum Pontificum, the Motu Proprio allowing priests to celebrate the extraordinary form without having to seek permission from their bishops (as had been the case before this letter), included this statement: "It is not appropriate to speak of these two versions of the Roman Missal as if they were 'two Rites'. Rather, it is a matter of a twofold use of one and the same rite." What I experienced yesterday just didn't seem like another use of the "same rite," of what I have come to know as the Mass. It seemed like a different rite to me.

I understand that Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI were trying to be pastoral to those people who missed the pre-conciliar liturgy or who had somehow longed for the benefits of that liturgy, including the traditionalist Society of St. Pius X. Benedict was certainly trying his best to bring this group into unity. But 95% of the people at that Mass yesterday had never even experienced the Mass before the Second Vatican Council in their actual lifetimes, including me (at least not in my memory). The Motu Proprio treats this issue: "Afterwards, however, it soon became apparent that a good number of people remained strongly attached to this usage of the Roman Rite, which had been familiar to them from childhood." And again: "Many people who clearly accepted the binding character of the Second Vatican Council, and were faithful to the Pope and the Bishops, nonetheless also desired to recover the form of the sacred liturgy that was dear to them." As I looked around that church yesterday, I wondered how the pre-conciliar rite had "become dear" to these people.

The Motu Proprio addresses this issue: "Immediately after the Second Vatican Council it was presumed that requests for the use of the 1962 Missal would be limited to the older generation which had grown up with it, but in the meantime it has clearly been demonstrated that young persons too have discovered this liturgical form, felt its attraction and found in it a form of encounter with the Mystery of the Most Holy Eucharist, particularly suited to them."

The Motu Proprio continues: "This occurred above all because in many places celebrations were not faithful to the prescriptions of the new Missal, but the latter actually was understood as authorizing or even requiring creativity, which frequently led to deformations of the liturgy which were hard to bear. I am speaking from experience, since I too lived through that period with all its hopes and its confusion. And I have seen how arbitrary deformations of the liturgy caused deep pain to individuals totally rooted in the faith of the Church." I agree with Pope Benedict's assertion and diagnosis that there were certainly places where creativity led to liturgies that lost their way. But I wonder if the expansion of the allowance of the extraordinary form was really an answer to this situation. Surely we have come a long

at Chicago in 1999. Gotta Sing Gotta Pray is Jerry's blog in which he shares reflections on current events in the Church and in the world that may be of particular interest to those serving the Church.

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way with the post-conciliar liturgical reform and that these "deformations" have become less and less as the years have gone on.

Benedict draws this conclusion in *Summorum Pontificum*: "There is no contradiction between the two editions of the Roman Missal. In the history of the liturgy there is growth and progress, but no rupture. What earlier generations held as sacred, remains sacred and great for us too, and it cannot be all of a sudden entirely forbidden or even considered harmful. It behooves all of us to preserve the riches which have developed in the Church's faith and prayer, and to give them their proper place. Needless to say, in order to experience full communion, the priests of the communities adhering to the former usage cannot, as a matter of principle, exclude celebrating according to the new books. The total exclusion of the new rite would not in fact be consistent with the recognition of its value and holiness."

As I said above, I left that Mass quite perplexed. It left me empty and full of questions. However, I do believe that the people in that church did find the spiritual nourishment for which they were seeking.

But, what I experienced was something that felt more like a museum piece. Many people around me were sitting there reading devotional material as the Mass unfolded up there. I found it so hard to enter into the experience because what was happening did not involve me at all. And I know there are those who would tell me that my silent assent and attentiveness to the mystery being celebrated is what participation is all about. Frankly, I find that argument to be hollow. I have a Catholic voice; I have a Catholic heart; I have Catholic vocal chords ready to sing God's praise. Unfortunately, yesterday's experience of the extraordinary form of the Mass never engaged this Catholic.

Folks, I would really like to hear from those of you who celebrate in the extraordinary form regularly. I need to hear how that form engages you and lifts your heart. I am desperately trying to understand how what I experienced yesterday is not a separate rite, but instead, as Pope Benedict said, another version of the same rite.

Gotta sing. Gotta pray.

Posted by [Jerry Galipeau, D. Min.](#) at [9:15 AM](#)



14 comments:

Anonymous said...

Perhaps you could give it one more try and go to the 12:30 Tridentine High Mass at St. John Cantius. You happened to end up in a bad situation, but at Cantius you'll find what the rest of us love.

October 21, 2013 at 10:02 AM



Mr. C said...