

GUARDIANS OF THE TRADITION:

Traditionis Custodes and the Celebration of the Liturgy in the Diocese of Lexington

On 16 July 2021 the Holy Father Pope Francis issued the *motu proprio* decree “Traditionis Custodes (TC)” concerning the Use of the Roman Liturgy as it was celebrated prior to the reforms initiated by the Second Vatican Council. In his decree, issued after consultation with the bishops of the world, Pope Francis asserts that there is henceforth one form of the Roman Liturgy (art. 1) and he substantially changes the provisions for the use of the Missal of 1962 that were contained in the *motu proprio* “Summorum Pontificum” of Pope Benedict XVI issued in 2007. As the Holy Father makes clear, there is no precedent for permitting two forms of the same rite in the Church to be in use simultaneously. The ongoing use of what was formerly referred to as the “extraordinary form” has emphasized rather than diminished the divisions within the Church according to the feedback received from the world’s bishops. Pope Francis states that the constant search for ecclesial communion is the motivation for the new directives contained in TC.

A significant feature of TC is its emphasis on the role of the diocesan bishop as moderator, promoter and guardian of the liturgical life of the diocese (art. 2). This is not limited to the regulation of the pre-conciliar celebration of the mass, but applies to all liturgical celebrations in the local Church. The issuance of this *motu proprio* provides an occasion to review the unity of our form of celebration in the diocese in accordance with the norms of the universal Church. One of the principles of the latest iteration of the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* (GIRM) is that the liturgy is not the private property of the priest celebrant but celebrated for the good of the whole Church. It is not the prerogative of the priest celebrant to impose personal tastes or preferences upon the celebration of the mass; although there are places within the liturgy where the rubrics permit some variation at the discretion of the celebrant.

The following paragraphs, divided into sections referring to the use of the Missal of 1962 and to the celebration with the current Missal, set forth my directives for the celebration of the Mass in the Diocese of Lexington and will be effective as of Ash Wednesday, 2 March 2022.

Celebration of the Mass according to the Missal of 1962

Traditionis Custodes instructs the bishops of dioceses where there are groups that use the pre-conciliar form of mass to 1) determine that these groups do not deny the validity and the legitimacy of the liturgical reform; 2) designate one or more locations where the celebration of the pre-conciliar mass outside of parish churches and without creating new personal parishes; and 3) establish the days on which such celebrations may occur in which the readings are proclaimed in the vernacular according to official translations for liturgical use approved by the bishops’ conference (art. 3).

The bishop is also to appoint a priest suitably prepared to celebrate the mass according to the missal of 1962 and provide pastoral care of the group which celebrates this form (art. 3.4). He is not to authorize the establishment of new groups (art. 3.6) and to determine whether or not to retain parishes erected for the benefit of these groups (art. 3.5).

If Bp. Stowe were correct, the Vatican would be attacking the Anglican Ordinariate; but the Vatican is NOT attacking the Ordinariate. Recently, Pope Francis seized a huge parish—taking it away from the diocese—and added it to the Ordinariate. Moreover, the current bishop in charge of the USCCB liturgical committee does not offer the “unique expression” of the Roman Rite; instead, he offers the Anglican Ordinate “use” (rite, variant, form—whatever you want to call it). In the recent document (*Traditionis Custodes*), Pope Francis basically admitted that the *Missale Recens* cannot compete on an even playing field with the *Missale Vetustum* ... and his admission shocked many.

This is false. Under the umbrella of the “Roman Rite” through the centuries numerous different “uses” and/or “rites” have peacefully co-existed. Some are very minor (such as the slight variations in a Mass said by a Franciscan). Others are extreme, almost constituting a completely different rite. Foolish people waste hours arguing nomenclature: whether *Salisbury, Lyons, Paris*, and so on constituted “rites” or “uses” or “forms.” The reality is, practically every Cathedral had some liturgical practices of their own; as did religious orders. As a matter of fact, the “Dominican Rite” is a variation (“form” or “use”) of the Roman Rite. It is certainly not an Eastern Rite. This has never been viewed as deleterious to Church “unity.”

But let’s pretend Bishop John Stowe is correct. Let’s pretend Pope Saint John Paul II allowed something “new” — did not Pope Francis A FEW HOURS AGO condemn those who embrace “forms of the past, paralysed by the fear of change” ??

You speak of “personal tastes,” Bishop Stowe, but on the second page of your letter (see below) you attempt to police what style of hat a priest may wear, and you also attempt to forbid “ad orientem” in spite of everything that the head of the CDW (under Pope Francis) wrote about this very subject. * You seem unaware, Bishop Stowe, that Vatican II declared:

“Even in the liturgy, the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not implicate the faith or the good of the whole community.”

Recently, the top liturgist—personally chosen by Pope Francis out of 7 billion people—wrote: “I believe that it is very important that we return as soon as possible to a common orientation, of priests and the faithful turned together in the same direction—Eastwards or at least towards the apse—to the Lord who comes, in those parts of the liturgical rites when we are addressing God. This practice is permitted by current liturgical legislation. It is perfectly legitimate in the modern rite.”

Shortly after the issuance of *TC*, I met with Father Mark Fischer, FSSP, Chaplain to the Regina Pacis Community in the Diocese. Father Fischer, as a member of the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter, assures me that as a member of that institute he is committed to the unity of the church and that as a community, Regina Pacis does not deny the legitimacy of validity of post-Vatican II liturgies. He agreed to discontinue the celebration of the pre-conciliar mass at Saint Peter's downtown and I have authorized the continuation of the celebration according to the 1962 Missal at Saint Francis de Sales Church in White Sulphur.

As of the date of issuance of *TC*, Father Mark Fischer is the only priest in the diocese authorized to celebrate according to the missal of 1962. No other priest has requested authorization to do so. Such authorization is required according to the *Motu proprio* (art. 5); priests can no longer presume to celebrate in this form as under the previous directives. The diocesan bishop is even required to consult the Holy See before giving authorization to any priest obtained after 16 July 2021, the date of the *motu proprio*.

It is clear from *TC* that the Holy Father sees the continued use of the Missal of 1962 as a temporary need in the Church;

The idea of two complementary forms of the same Roman Rite as decreed in 2007 is no longer considered workable in light of the need for unity in the Church. The letter from Pope Francis to the bishops of the world issued on the same day as *TC* stresses the need to guide the whole Church to a unitary celebration of the Mass.

Celebration of the Mass according to the Third Edition of the Roman Missal (2010)

Article 2 states forthrightly, "It belongs to the diocesan bishop, as moderator, promoter and guardian of the whole liturgical life of the particular Church entrusted to him to regulate the liturgical celebrations of his diocese."

That letter addressed to the bishops which accompanied the *motu proprio* also states, "I ask you to be vigilant in ensuring that every liturgy be celebrated with decorum and fidelity to the liturgical books promulgated after Vatican Council II, without the eccentricities that can easily degenerate into abuses." I am afraid that such "eccentricities" occur throughout the diocese and within that description I would include the addition of rites and gestures that are not included in the Roman Missal (e.g. priests and ministers kneeling at the foot of the altar during the introductory rites), the alteration of the text of the Eucharistic Prayer by the celebrant, the use of vesture previously discontinued (e.g. birettas, maniples) and unauthorized adaptations on the posture for receiving communion (kneeling at the communion rail). Of more concern is the celebration of the mass "*ad orientem*," especially when done because of the preference of the priest celebrant.

Therefore, as of Ash Wednesday (2 March) of this year, there are to be no "*ad orientem*" celebrations of the mass with a congregation in the Diocese of Lexington. The use of the biretta during the celebration of mass as well as the use of the maniples is to be discontinued. The norm for the reception of communion is to be standing; however, communion is not to be denied to individuals who insist on kneeling to receive. There should be no additions to the rites already contained in the Order of Mass.

The celebration of the liturgy will continue to be celebrated with a diversity of sacred music, expressions that are unique to language and ethnic groups, the layout and structure of the place of worship and other minor variations in practice that are foreseen by the liturgical books.

Given at Lexington on 2 February 2022, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord for implementation in the Diocese of Lexington by 2 March 2022, Ash Wednesday.

+ John Stowe, OFM Conv.

Bishop of Lexington

Then why did Pope Francis — on 20 February 2020 — approve a bunch of new Prefaces for the Extraordinary Form, including a Preface for the Dedication of a Parish Church? Bishop Stowe's approach here seems incredibly rigid—and contradicts the clear words of several popes.

(CROSSED OUT IN BLACK INK) Bishop John Stowe then makes a statement so false and uninformed that we will not reproduce it here — in the same way that we would not reproduce pornography or statements filled with racial hatred. In a certain sense, "hard core" porn would be less harmful than the fallacious statement Bishop John Stowe made here, because his words are directed toward the Holy Mass, wherein the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity becomes present on the Altar and offers Himself to His Heavenly Father.

We will assume His Excellency was having a bad day — but we will not reproduce such a misguided statement.

If bishop John Stowe wishes to be taken seriously, we challenge him to produce ANY EVIDENCE that he has taken even the smallest, most minuscule step to correct the abuse of musicians at the Ordinary Form replacing the Mass Propers (Introit, Responary psalm, Offertory, Communion, etc.) with unapproved texts. The Church clearly said that any text which replaces the proper must be approved by the bishop's conference. And yet, we know of only two churches in bishop John Stowe's diocese which follow the rules; all the others replace the propers with unapproved text and music AT EVERY SINGLE MASS. This destroys the integrity of the rite, and it happens at EVERY SINGLE MASS. Why does Bishop Stowe allow this, and focus on birettas?