

Fr. Bisig FSSP Clarifications

Letter from Fr Joseph Bisig to Fraternity Supporters

Dear Members and Friends of the Fraternity,

By now most of you have been made aware of some recent developments in the life of our institute. The purpose of this letter is to communicate to you accurate information so as to prevent disquiet due to the many rumors currently circulating. The enemy of mankind is always ready to stir the waters and cause confusion and discouragement. There are two important events I would like to share with you.

The first is the Protocol 1411/99 issued by the Congregation for Sacred Worship in reply to some questions regarding the use of the *Novus Ordo Missæ* by those priests involved with the traditional Roman liturgy. The second is the cancellation of the General Chapter of the Fraternity, due to meet this month of August, and the convocation instead of a plenary meeting in Rome for the month of November. First of all, let me assure you of our commitment to maintain the integrity of the founding principles and purpose of the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter.

These principles, grounded in the Protocol of Agreement of May 5th 1988 signed by Cardinal Ratzinger and Archbishop Lefebvre, include a priestly ministry exercised for the good of the whole Church through the use of the liturgical books of the Roman Rite in their 1962 edition. The reasons for this are twofold, one that we may call positive, and one that we may call negative. Positively, the Holy See has willed that we serve the Church by witnessing to the perennial tradition of the Roman liturgy in a time of rapid liturgical change.

Negatively, the Holy See has allowed us to initiate a respectful and open study of the objections and concerns we have towards some of the liturgical reforms begun after the Second Vatican Council. By a wide and generous application of the *Motu Proprio* of John Paul II, *Ecclesia Dei Adflicta*, the Holy See has until now blessed the apostolic work of the Fraternity and those others committed to the traditional Roman liturgy. In spite of this generosity, the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter has in recent years come under increasing pressure from various quarters, if not to celebrate the *Novus Ordo*, at least to allow its members to do so under particular circumstances.

As superior of the Fraternity, I have discouraged this on multiple grounds: fidelity to our own mission within the Church, avoidance of further unrest among our faithful

and members, consolidation and identity of our apostolate, and unity of life and discipline according to our Constitutions.

Our commitment to the traditional Roman liturgy has been the occasion for some to give credence to the false suspicion that the Fraternity rejects the validity of the Novus Ordo Mass. In addition, certain bishops and bishops' conferences have deemed it necessary to limit severely the pastoral activity of the Fraternity because of our preference to maintain the exclusive use of the ancient liturgy in our ministry.

Finally, in a time when concelebration has become the main (and sometimes only) expression of ecclesial unity, our will to live in unity with all Catholics according to the old customs and rites has become easily misunderstood. Due to these difficulties and misunderstandings, some of our priests, especially in France, have expressed their desire to concelebrate on occasion the Novus Ordo. Although they are largely moved by apostolic zeal in the face of what one might consider an unfair limitation on their ability to minister to the vast needs of the faithful, the superiors of the Fraternity have discouraged this for the sake of the common good of our institute.

I believe that our particular mission in serving the hierarchy and the faithful is at present not so much the quantitative expansion of our apostolate as the qualitative witnessing to the immemorial liturgical tradition of the Church. This situation led these priests, a small group among our members, to submit without my knowledge an official recourse to the Ecclesia Dei Commission on June 29 of this year.

Following this presentation, two matters now concern us: the "Official Reply" of the Sacred Congregation of Divine Worship, July 3rd Protocol 1411/99, and the cancellation of the General Chapter of the Fraternity and the convocation instead of a plenary meeting of our members in Rome, during the month of November. For the good of the Church and of our Fraternity, I have taken appropriate and legitimate steps to ensure that the proper authorities reconsider these measures. In fact, we ardently desire that the November plenary meeting might provide the opportunity for an honest and respectful exchange regarding our difficulties with some of the liturgical reforms.

We have to understand the need for a dialogue both seriously theological and fraternally open, in order to ensure that the legitimate points of all parties are taken into consideration and harmonized in a common policy. I will continue to do everything possible to protect the identity and character of the work that the Fraternity carries out on behalf of the whole Church. I request your prayers for myself, for our

members, and for those in the Church who have responsibilities towards the Fraternity.

With confidence, I lay our needs and hopes at the feet of the Virgin Mother, of our patron the Apostle Peter, and of his successor, the Holy Father. Our defense of the identity and mission of the Fraternity rises from our desire to be faithful to the Church and to the members and faithful who have trusted us with their vocations and concerns.

However, a strong defense of our convictions cannot take place without a humble submission to Providence and the Magisterium of the Church. Trials, when lived in the desire to obey God's will, are a tremendous occasion for purification and growth. It is in this light that we see our present difficulties. May this be an opportunity for us to renew our commitment to study and dialogue with others regarding those issues with which we are associated by our very mission. May this be an occasion to promote the knowledge and love of the Roman liturgy, and to enrich others by the faithful keeping of our vocation and particular laws. May this be also a circumstance in which we strengthen the unity that can only be the result of loyalty to our mission and the sanctity of our lives. Finally, may this be an occasion to deepen our experience of and love for the mystery of the Church, the immaculate Bride of our glorious Lord, Jesus Christ.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

Fr Joseph Bisig, FSSP Superior General