

Extraordinary Form 101

A Beginner's Guide to the Old Latin Mass

By: Thomas E. Woods Jr.

On July 7, 2007, Pope Benedict XVI launched one of the boldest papal initiatives since Vatican II: He declared that the traditional liturgy of the Roman rite, which he said was never abrogated, was officially available to all the Church's faithful alongside the new liturgy of Pope Paul VI. Pope John Paul II had allowed for the traditional Latin Mass on a limited basis since the 1980s; with his motu proprio *Summorum Pontificum* Pope Benedict removed the remaining restrictions.

In the letter he wrote to bishops, the Holy Father's words explaining his decision are but an elegant expression of common sense: If the older liturgy was sacred in the past, then it is sacred now as well. "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." *Summorum Pontificum* declared that the older liturgy "must be given due honor for its venerable and ancient usage." This due honor, according to Pontifical Commission "Ecclesia Dei" president Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos, should be shown by making the traditional Latin Mass available even where it has not been specifically requested. The pope is especially hopeful that young people will be exposed to the Extraordinary Form.

Although some Catholics have followed these matters very closely over the years, others may not have understood quite so clearly exactly what the pope has said and done, or what the practical results of all this might be. Here I provide answers to a number of common questions.

What do the terms "Ordinary Form" and "Extraordinary Form" mean?

For a long time, people referred to the new liturgy (or the Missal of 1970) as the "new rite" and the older liturgy (the most recent version of which is the Missal of 1962) as the "old rite." In his July 7, 2007 letter to bishops, Pope Benedict XVI said that we should instead think of these Missals as being two forms of a single Roman rite, rather than as two separate rites. Thus he prefers that instead of "new rite" and "old rite," we say "Ordinary Form" (his name for the Missal of 1970, or Novus Ordo Missae) and "Extraordinary Form" (the Missal of 1962, or the traditional Latin Mass).

The two forms use different liturgical calendars and different cycles of scriptural readings. The Extraordinary Form operates according to a one-year cycle, which means the same readings are used on the same dates every year. The Ordinary Form uses a three-year cycle, which means particular passages are usually used once every three years.

Are missals provided, like the missalettes parishes use for the Ordinary Form?

Wherever I have attended the Extraordinary Form, there have always been booklet missals available for the laity's use. If you attend the Extraordinary Form regularly, you'll want to acquire your own hand missal, which is available at online Catholic booksellers, as well as an increasing number of brick-and-mortar stores. These missals contain both the Ordinary of the Mass (the parts of the Mass that stay the same every day) as well as the propers, which are the changing parts of the Mass (such as the readings from Scripture, the Communion and post-Communion prayers), for every Mass of the year. They also tend to contain additional prayers for devotional purposes as well as much valuable information about the liturgy, the vestments, and other aspects of the Extraordinary Form.

Are the missals in Latin?

The missals are in Latin and English (or whatever the local language is). Latin is on one side and the vernacular language on the other. Anyone can follow along. Even with the missal, though, you may find yourself a little lost the first couple times you attend. Do not worry about every small detail. Soon enough, you'll find everything to be second nature. Should you want a brief tutorial, the longest chapter of my recent book *Sacred Then and Sacred Now: The Return of the Old Latin Mass* walks you through the Extraordinary Form step by step.

Are the readings in Latin?

Yes and no. When the scriptural passages are read in the context of the Mass, they are read in Latin, though of course you can read along with the English translation in your missal. Immediately before the sermon, the priest then repeats the readings in the vernacular language.

Do I kneel to receive Holy Communion? Do I receive on the tongue? Do I say "Amen"?

Yes, yes, and no. Communicants kneel at a Communion rail and receive on the tongue. The Extraordinary Form places great emphasis on avoiding any possibility of profanation of the host. You will notice, for example, that the priest holds the ciborium rather awkwardly. That is because, from the moment of the consecration until the purification of the sacred vessels, he may not separate his thumb and forefinger, lest even the smallest particle fall to the ground. It would be incongruous, after that kind of studious care, for him then to place the host into a layman's outstretched hand.

The communicant does not say "Amen." The priest says it as he places the host on the communicant's tongue. The priest does not say, "The body of Christ." He says, "May the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve your soul unto everlasting life. Amen." Amen, of course, means "let it be so." In other words, "may this reception of Holy Communion have the effects for which I have just prayed."

Will the priest have his back to the congregation?

Yes—but that is the wrong way to think about it. It is not a question of turning his back on the people. Instead, the priest and the people together face the same direction. Masses in which priest and people face a common eastward direction, whether in the Ordinary or Extraordinary Form, are called *ad orientem* Masses.

Fr. Joseph D. Santos, Jr., a priest of the Diocese of Providence, Rhode Island, gives a straightforward explanation of this traditional practice:

When a general leads his troops into battle, does he face them? When a representative of the people approaches the ruler on their behalf, does he face them? When a priest is going to the Lord on behalf of his people, should he face them? When the priest is acting as the intermediary between the people and God, he faces the altar. When he is dispensing the gifts of God, or speaking to the people, he faces the people. (Interview, Traditional Latin Mass Blog, August 1, 2007)

Scholars have begun to conclude, contrary to popular belief, that Mass facing the people was not in fact the regular practice of the early Church, and that Mass facing east has been the historic norm. "As I have written in my books, I think that celebration turned towards the east, towards the Christ who is coming, is an apostolic tradition," wrote Pope Benedict XVI in 2004, while still Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (*Looking Again at the Question of the Liturgy with Cardinal Ratzinger: Proceedings of the July 2001 Fontgombault Liturgical Conference*, 151). In fact, those parts of the early Catholic world in which the sacrificial aspect of the Mass was best understood were most likely to celebrate Mass *ad orientem*. "The common direction of priest and people is intrinsically fitting and proper to the liturgical action," Cardinal Ratzinger explained (*Foreword, Turning Towards the Lord: Orientation in Liturgical Prayer* by U.M. Lang).

Will I be able to get anything out of it if I don't speak Latin?

Of course. For centuries the popes insisted on the value of a non-vernacular language for the Mass, and as Catholics we owe them at least the benefit of the doubt that they cared about the spiritual lives of the faithful. It's easy to follow along in your missal, especially once you've attended this Mass a few times. Next to no one spoke Latin in the old days, and yet their souls were deeply nourished by the Mass, and (if polling data is to be believed) they understood the meaning of the Mass far better than do most Catholics today.

It's important to remember what Pope Bl. John XXIII said about the value of Latin. "The Catholic Church," he explained, "has a dignity far surpassing that of every merely human society, for it was founded by Christ the Lord. It is altogether fitting, therefore, that the language it uses should be noble, majestic, and non-vernacular" (*Veterum Sapientia*, On the Promotion of the Study of Latin). It makes sense that we should leave behind what differentiates us from each other as Americans, Frenchmen, Koreans, or whatever, and meet for worship in a language that privileges no single group but is the common possession of us all. Just two generations ago, wherever someone went in the world he would encounter the same Mass he knew at home—a beautiful testament to the universality of the Church.

That's one of the things that so impressed the British communist-turned-Catholic Douglas Hyde, who had looked in vain to secular organizations to give expression to the unity of the human race. In the mid-20th century he found what he was looking for in the Catholic Church, having been especially moved by its use of Latin:

At 11:30 p.m. on Christmas Eve I was twiddling the knob of my radio. Unable to get out to Midnight Mass I wanted at least to bring it to my fireside. And as I switched from one European station to the next I tuned in to one Midnight Mass after the other. Belgium, France, Germany, Eire, yes, even behind the Iron Curtain, Prague. It seemed as though the whole of what was once Christendom was celebrating what is potentially the most unifying event in man's history. And the important thing was that it was the same Mass. I am a newcomer to the Mass but I was able to recognize its continuity as I went from station to station for it was in one common language. This aspect of Catholicism is but a single one, and maybe not the most important. But I have a strong feeling that it is precisely the Catholicism of the Catholic Church which may prove the greatest attraction, and will meet the greatest need, for my disillusioned generation. (qtd. in Michael J. Miller, "The International and the Introibo: How the Catholic Mass Converted a Communist," *Sursum Corda*, Winter 1999)

Amid all the speculation regarding the Pope's motu proprio, columnist Barbara Kay, who attends an all-Hebrew service at her synagogue, explained why she as a non-Catholic favored the use of Latin in the Mass:

The power of liturgy to lift us out of our narrow practical and material pursuits is not dependent on our understanding of every actual word we are saying, any more than our emotional submission to classical music's soaring magic is dependent on our ability to read the score that produced it. . . . An ancestral, globally employed language like Hebrew or Latin provides a context for predictable and organic communion amongst those present at the service. Through regular engagement, even though rote, with a universally recognized language, worshippers are subliminally imbued with a common motivational narrative from the past, common moral goals in the present and intimations of a common destiny in the future. (National Post, "Latin's Second Coming," October 18, 2006)

She concluded her article for Canada's National Post very simply: "Bring back the Latin Mass."

Vatican II urged that "the use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rites," (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 36.1) and declared that the faithful should "be able to say or to sing together in Latin those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them" (SC 54). The case for Latin as a liturgical language is very strong, and I discuss and defend it at greater length in *Sacred Then* and *Sacred Now*.

Does the laity do anything?

Yes: The laity prays the Mass. No more sublime form of activity can be conceived.

Participation in the Mass does not mean only or even primarily physical activity. Evelyn Waugh put it this way: " Participation in the Mass does not mean hearing our own voice. It means God hearing our voices. Only he knows who is participating at Mass. I believe, to compare small things with great, that I participate in a work of art when I study it and love it silently. No need to shout" (A Bitter Trial: Evelyn Waugh and John Carmel Cardinal Heenan on the Liturgical Changes, ed. Scott M.P. Reid). According to the late Msgr. Richard J. Schuler, former editor of *Sacred Music*, "Listening is a truly active participation. Listening both to the proclaimed word and the performed music can be full, conscious and active participation. The same can be said for watching the ceremonial as it is enacted" ("Active Participation in the Church's Liturgy: What Did the Second Vatican Council Mean?," *Sacred Music*, October 1996). The great liturgical expert Dom Alcuin Reid describes active participation as "essentially contemplative."

Pope Benedict XVI, during his years as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, explained that the faithful's liturgical actions do not consist

only or primarily in the alternation of standing, sitting and kneeling, but in inner processes. It is these which give rise to the whole drama of the liturgy. "Let us pray"—this is an invitation to share in a movement which reaches down into our inner depths. "Lift up your hearts"—this phrase and the movement which accompanies it are, so to speak, only the "tip of the iceberg." The real action takes place in the deep places of men's hearts, which are lifted up to the heights. (*The Feast of Faith: Approaches to a Theology of the Liturgy*, 89)

There is, in other words, much silence in the Extraordinary Form. This is good and important, says Fr. Kenneth Myers of the Diocese of Pittsburgh:

Silence in the Mass is perhaps the greatest need of modern man because we so desperately need to peer into our souls, to enter into our own hearts, and to see there what God himself sees. In the silence of the traditional Latin Mass we can listen to God's voice within us.

The silence of the traditional Latin Mass reveals so clearly that the Mass is not the work of the congregation, a performance which we manufacture in order to make God happy with us. Rather, the Mass is the work of God—it is Christ's own work of Redemption carried out in our midst, on our altar. The Mass is not fabricated by man, it must be received in faith, and silence enables us to do just that: just as we do not "take" Holy Communion, but rather "receive" the Lord in the Sacrament, so do we receive Christ's Redemption in the Mass. ("A New Look at the Old Mass")

At the same time, in a High Mass there can also be plenty of congregational singing, from the principal parts of the Mass—e.g., the Kyrie, the Gloria, the Credo, the Sanctus, and the Agnus Dei —to the various responses (*Et cum spiritu tuo*, to take one example). I was always moved by the robust congregational singing of the Salve Regina at the conclusion of the old Mass at New York City's Church of St. Agnes, which I attended in the late 1990s.

Above all, participation in the Mass involves an interior union with the holy Sacrifice. "The uniqueness of the eucharistic liturgy," Cardinal Ratzinger wrote, "lies precisely in the fact that God himself is acting and that we are drawn into that action of God" (*The Spirit of The Liturgy*, 174). Any other activity is purely ancillary to this primary purpose. That so many Catholics emphasize external actions, rather than interior union with the Eucharistic sacrifice, as the essence of participation, is in Benedict's view a sign that "liturgical education today, of both priests and laity, is deficient to a deplorable extent" (*The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 175).

Why did the Pope do this?

For several reasons. First and most simply, Benedict has a deep respect for and devotion to the Extraordinary Form. He has been its great advocate for decades, having been (in his own words) "from the beginning in favor of the freedom to continue using the old Missal" (Address, Fontgombault Liturgical Conference). In 2001 he told a liturgical conference at France's Benedictine abbey of Fontgombault: "I well know the sensibilities of those faithful who love this [traditional] liturgy—these are, to some extent, my own sensibilities."

If people are attracted to this beautiful expression of the faith, it is part of the Church's generous nature to offer it to them. That is why Pope Benedict urged the world's bishops, "Let us generously open our hearts and make room for everything that the faith itself allows" (*Summorum Pontificum*, letter to bishops). In his letter to bishops, Benedict made particular mention of the Society of St. Pius X, whose irregular canonical status he doubtless hoped to rectify by bringing the Extraordinary Form back into the mainstream of Catholic life.

Beyond that, the Pope is concerned that in practice the new Missal has given rise to a spirit of improvisation that is at odds with a mature understanding of liturgy. "In many places," he told the bishops in his July 2007 letter,

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 have seen how arbitrary deformations of the liturgy caused deep pain to individuals totally rooted in the faith of the Church.

It is not merely the practice of the new liturgy but at times the new liturgical books themselves that bear responsibility for this problem, according to Benedict.

In the new missal we quite often find formulae such as: sacerdos dicit sic vel simili modo [the priest speaks thus or in words to this effect] . . . or, Hic sacerdos potest dicere [Here the priest may say]. . . . These formulae of the missal in fact give official sanction to creativity; the priest feels almost obliged to change the wording, to show that he is creative, that he is giving this liturgy immediacy, making it present for his congregation; and with this false creativity, which transforms the liturgy into a catechetical exercise for this congregation, the liturgical unity and the ecclesiality of the liturgy [are] being destroyed. Therefore, it seems to me, it would be an important step towards reconciliation, simply if the missal were freed from these areas of creativity, which do not correspond to the deepest level of reality, to the spirit, of the liturgy. (Looking Again at the Question of the Liturgy with Cardinal Ratzinger, 150-151)

The pope is also concerned that the way in which the new Missal was introduced gave the impression of a rupture with the past, that liturgies can be manufactured on the spot rather than developed over long periods of time. The new Missal, he once wrote, "was published as if it were a book put together by professors, not a phase in a continual growth process. Such a thing never happened before. It is absolutely contrary to the laws of liturgical growth" (The Feast of Faith, 86).

That sense of rupture was multiplied by the peculiar hostility that some Catholics after 1970 displayed for the traditional liturgy of their own Church and their impatience with those who continued to desire it. Thus in 1997, Cardinal Ratzinger declared:

I am of the opinion, to be sure, that the old rite should be granted much more generously to all those who desire it. It's impossible to see what could be dangerous or unacceptable about that. A community is calling its very being into question when it suddenly declares that what until now was its holiest and highest possession is strictly forbidden and when it makes the longing for it seem downright indecent. (Salt of the Earth: The Church at the End of the Millennium, 176)

The Extraordinary Form, to repeat, is to be given "due honor for its venerable and ancient usage." That is as it should be. As one of my friends puts it, we are talking about one of the great treasures of the Church, after all, not a radioactive moon rock. We should embrace it, not accuse those who desire it of sedition.

May Pope Benedict's wishes be respected, and in a spirit of joy and celebration.

SIDEBARS

"A Beautiful Act of Love"

As for the motu proprio . . . a precise, twofold intention emerges. First of all, there is the intention of making it easier to reach "a reconciliation in the bosom of the Church"; and in this sense, as has been said, the motu proprio is a beautiful act of love for the unity of the Church. In the second place—and this fact must not be forgotten—its aim is that of fostering a mutual enrichment between the two forms of the Roman rite: in such a way, for example, that in the celebration according to the missal of Paul VI (the ordinary form of the Roman rite) will be able to demonstrate, more powerfully than has been the case hitherto, the sacrality which attracts many people to the former usage.

—Msgr. Guido Marini, Master of Pontifical Ceremonies (Interview with L'Osservatore Romano, June 28, 2008)

EF Training and Resources

Pope Benedict's promotion of the traditional Latin Mass has generated a great deal of interest on the part of priests and laity alike. But a generation of Catholics, including most seminarians, have little knowledge of Latin or the intricate rubrics of the Extraordinary Form. Several groups established before the motu proprio's release are wholly dedicated to the traditional Mass. They offer priestly formation, training, and resources.

➤ Canons Regular of St. John Cantius; www.sanctamissa.org

The Canons Regular, a community of priests and brothers based in Chicago, was established by Cardinal Francis George in 1999. Today they offer workshops on the EF for priests all over the world.

- Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest (ICRSS); www.institute-christ-king.org

The Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest, a worldwide Latin Mass apostolate, has houses on four continents, including several in the U.S. It is dedicated to providing formation and resources for priests.

- Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter (FSSP); www.fssp.org

The FSSP has been celebrating and promoting the Extraordinary Form since 1988, when a number of priests and seminarians, who had been members of the Society of St. Pius X, reconciled with Rome. The FSSP is located in 16 countries, with 36 apostolates in the U.S. and Canada