

The Pontifical Tridentine Mass of Cardinal Ratzinger

Report by Una Voce International President, Michael Davies

The beautiful old city of Weimar in the former Eastern Zone of Germany, celebrated for its association with Goethe and Schiller, has been designated as the cultural capital of Europe for 1999. There will be countless concerts, plays, readings, and exhibitions, but the event most truly expressive of European culture took place in the Church of the Heart of Jesus on Saturday 17 April. The basis of all that is most profound and most beautiful in European culture, in art, architecture, literature, and music is Catholic. It was, I believe, Belloc who remarked that Europe is the Faith and the Faith is Europe. The supreme embodiment of this Catholic culture is the traditional Mass of the Roman Rite, and the most perfect embodiment of this Mass is a Pontifical celebration. It was just such a celebration that took place on 17th April on the occasion of the annual conference of the Pro Missa Tridentina Association. Although intended primarily as a solemn act of worship offered to the Blessed Trinity, it was without doubt the most sublime expression of European culture that will be witnessed in Weimar in the entire year of culture.

The celebration was strictly according to Fortescue, and the celebrant was no less than His Eminence Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. The sanctuary was packed with young priests and seminarians from the Fraternity of St. Peter and the Institute of Christ the King, all clad in the most exquisite possible vestments, and performing the complex ceremonies of the rite with faultless dignity. A schola of young priests and seminarians intoned with equal flawlessness Gregorian melodies that must surely have been created in heaven, and the celebration was made perfect by the wholehearted and active participation of the congregation who sang their parts of the liturgy with wholehearted enthusiasm and in accordance with the wishes of St. Pius X, Pope Pius XI and the Second Vatican Council. In the Apostolic Constitution *Divini Cultus*, 20 December 1928, Pope Pius XI demanded that: "In order that the faithful may more actively participate in divine worship let them be made once more to sing the Gregorian Chant, so far as it belongs to them to take part in it...they should not be merely detached and silent spectators, but filled with a deep sense of the beauty of the liturgy, they should sing alternately with the clergy or the choir, as it is prescribed." During his historic lecture in Rome in October 1998, this was precisely what Cardinal Ratzinger had demanded of traditionalists, and it must have been a great encouragement for him to offer the Holy Sacrifice for a congregation

which responded in so traditional a manner. The ethos of the Mass was certainly that of a papal celebration during the Pontificate of St. Gregory the Great, and could thus hardly have been more traditional. Traditional Catholics throughout the world owe a deep debt of gratitude to Cardinal Ratzinger both for his words and for his deeds in the cause of the Traditional Mass. His courage and integrity in accepting the fact that the liturgical renewal hoped for by the Fathers of Vatican II has not transpired, and in stating this openly, merits our profound admiration. His autobiography, *Milestones*, should be in every Catholic home, and every traditional Catholic should be able to quote from pages 146-149.

The Mass celebrated by Cardinal Ratzinger in Weimar on 17th April 1999 marks a milestone in the campaign for the restoration of the Roman Missal of 1962 to the altars of the Church. I count it a privilege to have been present in the Herz-Jesu Kirche on Good Shepherd Sunday and to see a true good shepherd offer the Holy Sacrifice for his flock in the most beautiful possible manifestation of what Father Frederick Faber described as “the most beautiful thing this side of heaven”. On 18th April I had the privilege of assisting at the 11:15 Traditional Mass celebrated by the parish-priest each Sunday in the Church of St. Michael, Recklinghausen with the blessing of his bishop. While this celebration in which the priest was assisted by only two acolytes could not match the magnificent ceremonies of the Pontifical Mass of the previous day it was a model of what a typical parish celebration should be. Led by a small schola the participation of the faithful in the ordinary was enthusiastic and of a high standard.

Regular Sunday Masses according to the 1962 Missal are somewhat rare in Germany due to the hostility of the majority of the bishops. Such celebrations still do not take place in the vast majority of parishes in the English-speaking world, but during the early-morning drive to Recklinghausen I witnessed a sight that should encourage us never to abandon hope. Weimar is in the former Russian zone of Germany and during the journey to Recklinghausen we passed through the site of the former barrier between East and West. The watchtowers and fences which marked the boundary between tyranny and freedom have been allowed to remain in place as a reminder of what once had been, and which most of those imprisoned behind it had feared would always be. Even in dioceses with the most intransigent bishops the traditional Catholics should never abandon hope. With prayer anything is possible, and we must pray above all for what Cardinal Ratzinger told us to hope for in his 24 October 1998 lecture in Rome, a new generation of bishops who will no longer oppose the celebration of the Mass of our Fathers which formed the heart of the Faith of our Fathers.