

The Ancient Mass at St. Mary Major

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The Solemn Pontifical Mass that was celebrated on Saturday May 24, 2003 by Cardinal Castrillon Hoyos in accordance with the rite of St. Pius V in the Basilica of St. Mary Major, is a significant milestone towards the full restoration of the traditional Mass.

It was not a coincidence that the date chosen for this Mass was the feast of Our Lady Help of Christians. It is St. Pius V, whose relics are venerated in this Basilica, who in gratitude to Our Lady for her intercession in the victory at Lepanto against the Turks, introduced in the Litanies of Our Lady the invocation Auxilium Christianorum (Help of Christians). The Mass was preceded by the devout recitation of the glorious mysteries of the Rosary.

Five Cardinals were in attendance: Jorge Arturo Medina Estevez, Prefect Emeritus of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments; William Baum, Major Penitentiary Emeritus; Alfons Maria Stickler, Archivist and Librarian Emeritus of the Holy Roman Church; Bernard Law, Archbishop Emeritus of Boston; and Armand Gaetan Razafindatandra, Archbishop Emeritus of Antananarivo, Madagascar. The Basilica was full to capacity. The *Corriere della Sera*, a major Italian newspaper, reports that there were three thousand faithful. There were many Italians who had arrived from different parts of the peninsula. Many French pilgrims and several groups of English speaking traditionalists were also present.

The Mass was preceded by the reading of a letter from the Secretary of State Cardinal Angelo Sodano, who in the name of the Holy Father welcomed and gave his blessings to the traditionalist Catholics who were present in the Basilica.

The homily of Cardinal Castrillon Hoyos contained very important declarations that greatly strengthen the status of the traditional Mass. His homily was divided into three parts: a first part dedicated to Our Lady; a second part dedicated to the importance for all Catholics to be fully in union

with the Magisterium; and, a third that dealt with the traditional Mass itself. Qualified persons with whom I consulted in this matter, are convinced that these positions are not the Cardinal's own personal opinions, but rather the official positions of the Holy See. The Cardinal stated that:

1. The rite of St. Pius V cannot be considered abolished and the Holy Father has expressed his benevolent welcome to all the faithful who, recognizing the legitimacy of the Roman Rite renewed in accordance with the indications of the Council, remain attached to the previous normative rite.
2. Several citations from the Second Vatican Council paved the way to establishing the principle contained in the Introduction of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy which states: "Holy Mother Church holds all lawfully recognized rites to be of equal right and dignity; that she wishes to preserve them in the future and to foster them in every way."
3. For that reason the old Roman rite preserves its place in the Church within the multiplicity of Catholic rites, both Latin and Oriental. What unites these diverse rites is the same faith in the Eucharistic mystery, whose profession has always assured the unity of the Church.

Conclusion

The celebration of this Mass is a major event that in itself sends a powerful message to the Church at large on the permanent value of the traditional liturgy.

In a forthright manner, Cardinal Castrillon Hoyos has demonstrated that the traditional rite has never been abolished and remains as one of the rites of the Church. With this he makes an important gesture of encouragement to the whole of the traditionalist community and sends a message to the members of the hierarchy who refuse to grant the traditional Mass, or grant it with restrictions.

It is evident that this statement has to be followed by concrete measures of a legally binding nature, which will establish the principle of the permanence of the traditional rite.

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