



Transition of the Latin Mass: Sympathy and Hope

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Two weeks ago, I announced the transition of the celebration of this Mass to using the current liturgical books of the Roman rite. Last week I gave an explanation of the discernment leading to that decision. This week I would like to acknowledge the feelings that many are having, to express sympathy with the emotions that are swirling around it, and then to give reasons to hope that might help those who are struggling to understand what to expect.

First, I would like to ask forgiveness from anyone who felt hurt by the way this was presented. I never intended to offend or wound anyone, and I know that is certainly true for the bishop. But I do know the dangers out there for the flock, dangers learned from personal experience, from people who used to attend this parish, but have opted to rupture communion over things like this. These are things that will inevitably cause an emotional reaction in the hearts of those who love the ancient forms of worship and so I beg your mercy for any unintended feeling of offense. I love you. I want what is good for you. I do not wish you harm, but I acknowledge that many parishioners are feeling wounded and hurt. Especially for you, I would like to invite you to a listening session (for 11:30 Mass parishioners) on Wednesday, November 5 at 6pm in Varallo Parish Hall, along with a potluck dinner. I invite you to come with your questions and observations.

I especially want to hear from you about what the ancient ways have meant to you. What do you feel you will be losing in this transition? What do you fear in celebrating the reformed order of Mass?

Second, know that I have wrestled with this for some time. Know that I share the struggle in understanding what this change will mean for us, and I don't have it all figured out. I am seeking understanding of this direction the leaders of the Church have asked of us. I have sympathy in this moment. I want you to know that I am on your side, even though some may think I am not. I understand well the feeling of betrayal and resentment for what was lost. I felt this myself when I discovered the richness of our Catholic liturgical tradition. I discovered this while in the seminary, long before *Summorum Pontificum* was issued. When I read books like *The Spirit of the Liturgy* by Cardinal Ratzinger and *Turning towards the Lord* by Fr. Lang and *The Reform of the Roman Liturgy* by Msgr. Klaus Gamber, it was as if a light was turned on. I recall the immense joy I experienced in learning about the sacred traditions of the liturgy: orientation, language, gestures, and especially sacred music. I also recall the sense that these holy and beautiful things had been stolen and hidden from me. So, I can sympathize with what you may be feeling in this moment. I share your feeling of betrayal by those who told us traditional things were bad or harmful. Know that I am not saying traditional things are bad. I lament with you when I see the most holy thing we do reduced to cheap entertainment and turned into a folk gathering or an informal coffee clatch. I cringe just like you when I hear banal music with theologically deficient texts sung to tunes meant for a lounge or a stage being sung at the most solemn moments of divine worship. Like you, I found a treasure trove of truth, beauty, and goodness in those things that a certain generation rashly and imprudently jettisoned in their zeal to implement the reform. In this, we can recognize that in many places, the reform surely went beyond what was called for. In fact, these past few weeks I have been reading through the documents on the liturgy since Vatican II, and I see a consistent effort by the Church to correct these errors and liturgical abuses and call us all back to authentic reform.



I share your longing and desire for the recovery of the sacred. But here is the part that perhaps you may find surprising. I found these things we love defended and promoted even in the documents of the reform. Gregorian chant holds pride of place. The Latin language is to be preserved. The people are to know their parts in Latin. *Versum populum* worship was not ordered by the council, and *ad orientem* is still assumed in the rubrics of the current Roman Missal. Communion on the hand was only a concession to disobedient pastors, not a universal directive. Extraordinary ministers were not supposed to become so ordinary. The rules for offering Holy Communion under both species are still there, even if they are brazenly unenforced in most places. Look around you at this parish and what we have accomplished together over the years. We were celebrating the recovery of these holy and good things here even before the weekly celebration of the 1962 Missal, because we were following the already existing defense of tradition found in the documents, rubrics, and directives following the reform. We want the fullness of the Catholic faith. We want the traditions. Especially among the young, this clear call for continuity and valuing ancient things is being heard. But we also want these things in communion with the pope and the bishops.

I understand the desire to retreat into the security and stability of the older form. It is in no way wrong to appreciate, value, and desire what is good. We aren't wrong for seeing and appreciating goodness in the pre-conciliar rites. For a time, I, too, took refuge in the *stabilitas formae* of the *vetus ordo*. I share your fear of the spirit of rupture that has seemingly overtaken the reform in many quarters. I share your frustration with bishops and pastors who do not permit what is allowed universally, while allowing abhorrent abuses to continue without a word. It is disheartening to see many bishops seek to impose the rigidity of their own versions of the reform even when they have been proven to be unfruitful. I have been just as angry as you when I hear about bishops denying communion to those who simply want to kneel to receive our precious Lord in the Eucharist. I, too, have been upset when I hear of bishops imposing a myopic view of the liturgy that comes from the 'beige' period of Catholicism. We pastors can be real boneheads at times, for sure. But notice how the Church universal came to our rescue and gave us a correction with a reiteration of the legitimate posture of kneeling and receiving Communion on the tongue. We do it freely here. I truly believe a similar reiteration will come about *ad orientem*. The orientation of our Eucharistic prayer *ad Deum* can never be denied, and the church has reiterated it in documents that clarify the words used in the rubrics. I lament with you the horizontalization of our prayer as if the Eucharistic prayer is prayed towards the people. I've heard from many laity that they don't want the priest to put on a performance for us as if he were on stage to entertain us. I've watched as priests speak words to the Father but look into the eyes of the faithful, as if they were supposed to be making some personal connection with the people at that transcendent moment. No wonder there is a mistaken ecclesiology and theology that has developed in some places. But that is a defect of the implementation, not of the reform itself. For sure, there is a lot of malformation and misinformation out there about who we are and what we are doing. It needs to be corrected. But we who have read the documents and appreciate the gift of our sacred tradition know that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is not a celebration of ourselves in a closed circle of affirmation; it is the Church's worship of the Divine. It is one of the reasons I truly believe we need to recover the proper orientation of prayer through things like the *ad orientem* posture at the Eucharistic Prayer. It is the very thing discerned by millennia of Christian praxis in both East and West. It cannot be denied that it is a legitimate direction in prayer.

However, I am anxious that many have abandoned the reform and fighting the good fight for tradition in favor of a withdrawal, preferring to form a ghetto of isolation, rather than any attempt at reform, because there have been setbacks. This is where I see the wound that needs to be healed. And this is where we may disagree. That is ok.

Those opposed to these sacred traditions want you on the margins. I want you squarely in the heart of the Church. They want you where you can't influence others with your desire for the sacred traditions. I want you out front and visible with your love of sacred things. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. A lamp is not meant to be



hidden. Many priests have reached out to me with hope these past couple of weeks about what we are moving to here. Traditional things in many places have been relegated to off-site locations since *Traditionis Custodes*. They see in this option the opportunity to expand more widely the traditional things their own people are asking for in the heart of the Church.

We are listening. We feel with you. The Church loves you. The Pope loves you. The Bishop loves you. I love you. I want what is good for you. You have a voice, and it is being heard, even if it is not precisely in the way you may desire.

Some of that listening has already begun, and I would like to speak to you with answers as best I can. But know that I don't have all the answers, and I couldn't possibly give them all here, even if I did. Yes, some things will be different and there are some things we will miss. That happens with any change. But nothing essential will be lost - this is the act of faith I ask of you. What we will gain is an attempt at realizing the reform the universal Church called for. To quote G.K. Chesterton, "if a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly." Thus, the benefit for us is to at least try, and I am sure it is going to be good, even if it isn't perfect.

Will this transition mean the end of a traditional understanding of the Mass? The short answer is no. The Doctrine on the Mass has not changed, nor could it ever. We can very clearly still see the four ends of the Mass of adoration, thanksgiving, expiation, and petition being fulfilled even in the current Mass. There may be certain emphasis on things like the actual participation of the faithful along with the priest at Mass, but there was no doctrinal change in the fundamental understanding of the Holy Sacrifice. You have heard me preach numerous times about the primacy of interior participation as the heart of actual participation. And I quote modern popes in doing so.

Will this transition mean a reduction of the understanding of the sacrificial nature of the Mass? The short answer is no. The Doctrine still stands that the Mass is the Holy Sacrifice of Christ on Calvary and His eternal offering of that sacrifice to the Father made present to us. The argument is sometimes made that the new Mass is more about the Lord's Supper than about the Sacrifice of Christ. However, what is going on in the reform is a recovery of the importance of the reception of Holy Communion, and not just by the priest. His reception may be the minimum for the completion of the offering of Mass, but it does not and should not preclude the participation of the faithful in this Holy Communion either. Did you know that the rite for Communion of the faithful is not present in the 1962 order of Mass? It is only an extra ritual inserted, from the front of the book, that you enjoy when you are invited to Holy Communion. The old order of Mass doesn't ordinarily include a place for you. Your communion is only as a secondary consideration in the rubrics as they were received in 1962. In the *Novus Ordo Missae*, the Communion of the faithful is written straight in the order of Mass. The recovery of the fact that the reception of Holy Communion by the faithful is an integral part of the Mass is a very good acknowledgement that the people matter, and the people are part of the Mass. Does it take away from the sacrifice of the Mass that the faithful are invited to sup with our Lord at Holy Communion? We are not losing the sacrifice; we are gaining a richer understanding that Holy Communion of the faithful is a part of the Mass.

Will this transition mean a reduction of the understanding of the sacrificial nature of the priesthood? The short answer is no. The Doctrine on the Priesthood has not changed, nor could it ever. While the importance of the faithful and their role in the Mass is clarified, it has been reiterated multiple times by popes and official documents that this is not a clericalization of the laity or a laicization of the clergy. It doesn't mean an army of laity should now take over the sanctuary. It simply means owning the part that rightly belongs to the people at Mass. The parts that the servers say are **your** parts. They just happen to do them for you because they are in the Latin language. But you are invited to do them, too! Did you know that already in the text of the old Mass, the *Orate*,



fratres, speaks about *meum ac vestrum sacrificium* - **your** sacrifice? You may not have realized it, because the rubrics had the priest say it quietly, and only the servers would respond. Now, the priest will say it out loud, and you will be asked to respond. Nothing changes about the theology. All that is changing is that you are asked to own what is yours.

Will this transition mean the end of pious traditions like the Ember Days and Septuagesima and the various other penitential practices throughout the year? The short answer is no. We were emphasizing these beautiful traditions even before our weekly celebration of the 1962 Missal. They continue to form a part of our heritage and tradition and can benefit us still, even if they will not have a formal liturgical space for them. What prevents us from continuing to honor them as devotional practices?

Again, I would recall that long before we were celebrating a weekly Mass in the *vetus ordo*, we were already celebrating the joy of our Catholic tradition here. Now we will have the benefit of bringing even more from the storehouse of sacred tradition with us.

With joy, I would like to share a few ways that will be taking shape in the transition. We will keep in devotion many things that before were done by ritual. The priest will continue praying the vesting prayers in the sacristy; they are already there in the current Missal. We will be praying the prayers known as the Prayers at the Foot of the Altar together with the servers before Mass begins. I invite you to do the same from your pews. We will be offering the traditional *Asperges* rite as a pre-Mass devotional. We are not pretending it is part of the new order, but neither are we denying it has goodness by itself. What I hope can come about is that rather than fearing the traditional elements will somehow overshadow the reform, we can now embrace them fully without fear, even as we receive the legitimate fruits of the reform. As Pope St. John Paul II often said, “Do not be afraid!” Do not be afraid of our tradition, and do not be afraid of the call to reform.

In the Mass we will transition to, wherever there is an option, the one that conforms most with the hermeneutic of continuity will always be chosen. All of the propers and ordinary for the Mass will be sung using the *Graduale Romanum* and *Kyriale*. These books were adapted and issued after the Second Vatican Council and are the official books of sacred music for the Church. The full Gradual will be sung. Our sacred music will continue to make use of polyphony and traditional choral pieces written for the Holy Mass. The *Confiteor* and absolution will be done at every Mass, something that many of you only read, but now you will be able to participate by saying it. The Roman Canon will be used and said out loud, but the microphone will be off. Thus, we will fulfill the requirement of saying it *vox clara*, but also respect the tradition of silence during the Canon. The priest will continue to face *ad orientem*, that is, towards the altar, during the Eucharistic Sacrifice. He will turn to the faithful at the appropriate times as indicated in the rubrics already in the current Missal. We will still bow our heads at the name of Jesus and the mention of our Lady and our patronal saints. The servers will continue to ring the bells, swing the thurible, hold the candles, and even lift the hem of the chasuble and many other things that add to the elevation of the most holy moments of the Mass. There is no reason to omit good things simply because they are not prescribed. If the faithful in many places choose to hold hands at the Our Father as a devotion, there is nothing to prevent continued devotion to traditional practices, especially if they will be used as aids to assist us who are wary of the excesses of the reform to embrace its authentic expression. The Creed will still be sung, and no one will stop you if you genuflect at the Incarnation; it is in fact called for by the rubrics of the new Mass at certain times of the year. No one is going to stop you if you repeat the *Domine, non sum dignus*, three times. No one is going to stop you from receiving our Eucharistic Lord kneeling and on the tongue at our beautiful altar rail. We will still have space for the St. Michael Prayer and the Marian antiphon after the *Ite Missa Est*.



With these and many more things like it, I hope at least some of the questions you have in your hearts have been addressed. This is not a black and white situation. It is not a duality, as some would suppose, between tradition and modernity. There are no clown Masses being offered here. Only that which stands in fidelity to the universal call to reform made at the Second Vatican Council and offered with the hermeneutic of continuity as our guide. This is reason to hope!

I invite you to ask for the spirit of peace and patience in these confusing times. I ask that as we follow the path of transition you do so with serenity, and trust in Divine Providence that He hears the cry of the poor and that we can always hope in the Lord.