

The Traditional Latin Mass

Ever since Pope Francis issued a *moto proprio* (a sort of papal executive order) regarding the celebration of the Traditional Latin Mass, there have been people asking questions about all of this and what it means.

What is the Traditional Latin Mass (the TLM)? Also known as the Tridentine Rite and the Extraordinary Form, it is the “old Mass” that was the only form of Mass worship in the Latin Rite prior to 1967. Perhaps the most notable characteristics of the TLM are that ecclesial Latin is the only language spoken (apart from the homily) and that the priest faces with the people toward the high altar (a worship orientation called *ad orientum*, “toward the East”). Meanwhile, the *Novus Ordo* Mass (promulgated by Pope Saint Paul VI in 1967) is the form the Mass worship most prevalent in the Latin Rite today. The “New Mass” uses the vernacular (the local spoken language; English, in our case), and the priest faces toward the people (a worship orientation called *ad populum*, “toward the people”).

It is important to note that the *Novus Ordo* can be (and frequently is) celebrated using Latin and with the priest facing toward the altar. Therefore, the substantial differences between the TLM and the *Novus Ordo* are structural in nature (what prayers are said, by whom, and at what point in the Mass; what texts from Sacred Scripture are proclaimed at any given Mass and by whom; etc.). And so, just because the Mass might be celebrated in Latin does not automatically mean that the Mass is the TLM. That is important to keep in mind.

Now, for some strange reason, the TLM has been a subject of division amongst Catholics; people who prefer the TLM apparently are making a judgment about people who prefer the *Novus Ordo*. There are some who prefer the TLM who would argue that the *Novus Ordo* is an invalid Mass, but they are wrong. The Church (the Mystical Body of Christ and the Bride of Christ) promulgated the *Novus Ordo*, and therefore it is valid. Nothing with regard to our immutable teachings of faith or morals is adulterated by the *Novus Ordo*, and so, it is valid.

On the other hand, people who prefer the *Novus Ordo* sometimes think that those who prefer the TLM are extremist, right-wing-wacko, more-Catholic-than-the-pope types. Also wrong. I know many TLM worshippers and they are just as Catholic and just as much in need of the grace of God as everyone else.

What did the pope do about the TLM with his *moto proprio*? In conversation with the world’s bishops, it is evidently the case (or at least the bishops’ perceptions) that rather than being an agency of unity, the TLM has actually worsened divisions throughout the Church. The pope, therefore, has issued his *moto proprio* to rein in the use of the TLM and to regulate who can celebrate the TLM and where. Some critics comment that this is papal overreach, especially for a pope who is heralded as a pope of a decentralized Church. Some proponents comment that the TLM should have never been allowed in the first place after 1967. But such commentary is just further division – it is not helpful, nor does it achieve what Pope Francis and his *moto proprio* are aiming to achieve: Christian unity.

My own thoughts on the matter: I do not know the TLM; therefore I do not celebrate it. I have been to it three times in my life and each was as confusing to me as the last. At the same time, I am a huge fan of Latin; it is a beautiful language, especially when chanted and sung, and it wounds me terribly and personally when I introduce Latin into our Mass worship here at Saint Mary only to

be accused of trying to drag the Church back into the Dark Ages. Anyone who accuses me of that: you will find me waiting for you in the confessional, and I am not kidding.

Now, though I do not know the TLM nor have any plans of learning it, I am a huge fan of it because it is an important part of our Catholic Christian tradition and a very rich component of our authentic worship. I know people who came back into the Church from various non-Catholic *sede vacante*¹ groups who know only the TLM and who have wanted to come home to the Church, and the TLM was very instrumental as an agency of unity in that regard. For example, our own local order of diocesan sisters, the Sisters of Mary Mother of the Church, used to belong a non-Catholic *sede vacante* group that is located on Mount Saint Michael, here in Spokane, and the Sisters are now home in the Church.

Furthermore, there are more than thirty valid liturgical expressions and forms of worship used throughout the Catholic Christian world, of which the *Novus Ordo* is only one. The greater the variety (as long as it is valid, in keeping with faith and morals, and reverent), the better. After all, as we know, not everyone is the same; the Church literally has dozens of ways for us to worship God, which reflects this reality. Right here in Spokane Valley, on Evergreen (north of Trent), we have a Catholic parish church that worships according the Byzantine Rite of the Mass.

It is important to realize that the pope has not forbidden the TLM outright. Here in our own Diocese, the TLM is celebrated at Saint Francis Xavier in north Spokane, and as far as I know, it will continue to be celebrated there. Saint Joan of Arc in Post Falls also celebrates the TLM and will continue to do so. And so, for our own local concerns, the pope's *moto proprio* really will have very little effect.

For more information on all of this and to learn more about what the *moto proprio* actually says, I have found the following article on the Catholic news sources, The Pillar, to be very good, both with regard to reporting what was actually said and in providing a historical context for what has been going on in recent years to have prompted the TLM and related concerns:

<https://www.pillaratholic.com/p/extraordinary-changes-for-extraordinary>

Let us continue to pray for the Holy Father, for all of the bishops of the Church, and also for one another. In an age when it seems that everything is controversial and everyone is offended by anything, all the more do we who dare to claim the blessed name of Christian need to strive, with the grace of God, to be agents of peace.

God bless you all.

¹ *Sede vacante* is Latin for “the seat of vacant,” referencing the chair of Saint Peter, meaning that there is no pope and that whomever is claiming to be the pope right now is invalid.