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## Introduction to the Traditional Roman Rite

### **Traditional Catholic Thought and Practice: Introductory thoughts**

Father Peter Stravinskis, who used to write a pamphlet called *The Catholic Answer*, gave a sermon recently in which he commented *that all 23 rites of the Catholic Church* celebrate the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul on the same day, June 29<sup>th</sup>. Most of us can't name all 23 rites. Some of us didn't know there *were* 23 separate rites within the Catholic Church. If we lived in Lebanon, we would likely worship God using the Maronite Rite, named for St. Maron. If we lived in Milan, we would use the Ambrosian Rite, named for St. Ambrose. If we lived in Iran or Iraq, we would use the Chaldean Rite. The Syro-Malabar Rite is used in India. The Syriac Rite, by contrast, is used in modern-day Syria, and dates from the time of the apostle, St. James. The Roman Rite, unsurprisingly, originated in Rome. Pope Benedict XVI tells us that there are two forms of this rite, equal in dignity, which he terms the Ordinary form and the Extraordinary form. Although it is called the Extraordinary Form in the law, it has many other nicknames: TLM (short for Traditional Latin Mass); *Vetus Ordo* (which means "old order"); *Usus Antiquior* (which means "older use"); Mass of the Ages; Tridentine Rite (so-called because a reform of the liturgical books was ordered by the Council of Trent); and lastly, the Pre-Vatican II Mass (inaccurately, because it was celebrated *at* Vatican II and for nearly 10 years *afterward*, widely, and because Pope Benedict reminds us that it has, in law and in principle, always been allowed).

While there are two forms of the rite, there is much continuity between them. For example, for the consecration of a church building, in both forms the choir sings *Terribilis est locus iste*: this place is one which inspires holy fear. At another point in the same Mass, the choir sings *Locus iste a Deo factus est*: this place is made by and for God. Although Mass can be said on board an ocean-going ship, in a hotel conference meeting room, in a concentration camp in Poland, a Gulag in Soviet Russia or even the battle fields of northern Europe, using the front of a jeep as an altar, the proper environment for the public worship of the King of Kings is in a building especially designed for that purpose, a place which is awe-inspiring because of Who lives there, in the Tabernacle, a place which is the *porta caeli*, the gate of heaven. What takes place in this building, whether it is a Mass or some other act of public worship by the Church (and yes, there are several others) is essentially set apart from the world. When you enter a church building, remember these words: *Locus iste a Deo factus est. Terribilis est locus iste.*

I mentioned a moment ago that there is more than the Mass in the public acts of worship of Holy Mother Church. I will treat some of those other public acts of worship in due course. For now, just know that there are also varying degrees of solemnity – of elaborateness of ritual – within the one rite of Mass. The "norm", that is, the yardstick by which all things are measured, is the most solemn, sung form of Mass in which the bishop is the celebrant. Although I myself have attend an ordination performed by then-bishop Cordileone at St. Jarlath's parish in Oakland, since most of us will never have the pleasure of attending a Pontifical Solemn High Mass ("Pontifical" in this case means "of the bishop") — I want to start a little closer to home, keeping in mind some important principles. In this parish, there are four degrees of solemnity which you will encounter. Although each of these forms has a technical

Latin description, for simplicity, I am going to refer to the various forms with their common English names. The most elaborate is the Solemn High Mass. A step down from that is the High Mass (our normal Sunday Mass is a High Mass). A step down from that is the “Low Mass with Organ”, and the bottom rung of the ladder is called Low Mass. Music is extremely important to the celebration of the Mass, and Church documents call music “integral” to the Mass, and sacred music “greater than any other art”, but – to be absolutely clear on this point – an absence of music doesn’t **invalidate** the Mass; rather, it makes it less ornate, less properly-outfitted, less fitting for the worship of God, but still valid.

In its ideal form, the celebration of Mass does Pope Pius X one better: he instructed people not to pray *at* Mass, but to *pray the Mass*. If we *consciously* participate, both interiorly and exteriorly, we don’t merely *pray* the Mass, but *sing* the Mass, with our voices and with our hearts. So, what parts of Mass are sung with our voices? The short answer is “nearly everything, but not everything is sung by everyone”. The *nearly* is important. There is a part called the “Ordinary”, which is often sung by congregation, clergy and choir. There are the proper chants, usually sung by the choir. The priest sings the Collect (an “opening” prayer), the Epistle (usually from St. Paul’s letters) and Gospel, and his part in the dialogues, to which we reply, the Preface and the Post Communion prayer. At a Solemn High Mass, even the “third confiteor” is sung. That would be *nearly* everything. He doesn’t sing the sermon, because the sermon isn’t part of the Mass in the technical sense, and he doesn’t sing the prayers close around the consecration, prayers which are known, collectively, as Canon of the Mass.

It’s worth dwelling on why he doesn’t sing these prayers. As with many questions about the Mass, there is both a practical and a theologically rich explanation. I’ll start with the purely practical. According to a Catholic encyclopedia called *New Advent*, there was a time in the distant past when the priest didn’t begin the Canon until the choir had finished singing the *Sanctus* and *Benedictus*, which usually exist as a single chant. At this point in time, many years ago, the Canon might have been said aloud, but *New Advent* doesn’t assert that this was the case. When the priest didn’t wait for the choir to finish singing – since he can clearly read the words faster than we can sing them properly – he continued in a voice so as not to disturb the singing. This practice – not interrupting a liturgical action already in progress by initiating a competing action – highlights the fact that the Mass, which is beautiful in its essence, must be presented beautifully.

Theologically speaking, the priest is ordained to act *in persona Christi*, and so the act of consecrating the Sacred Host is a particularly priestly act--- no, I’ll go stronger than that. It’s an exclusively priestly act. If I put Canon Ueda in a hermetically sealed container for a moment, and consider him *not here*, all of the rest of us could fill the largest stadium in the world, but without a priest, no Mass would happen. By contrast, a single priest in the most un-church-building-like setting can, if he has proper form, matter and intent, celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. When the priest speaks the words of consecration, it is he, and he alone, who says these words, in as low a voice as he can. He says them facing the Altar, the Tabernacle and the Crucifix. Given that form, matter and intent are necessary for the validity of any sacrament, distractions in a priest are those things we should want to minimize. He should be wholly focused on the task at hand.

There's an apocryphal story about St. Thomas More, according to which He was attending Mass on one occasion when a messenger from the king arrived and summoned him to Court. Remember that the king in this case was Henry VIII, who had six wives and was known to be hot tempered: a person who resisted the king could, quite literally, lose his head. Thomas replied to the messenger that when he had finished his audience with his *heavenly king*, he would attend his *earthly* one. This should help us understand where our focus should be, by an act of the will, if not always possible because of the vicissitudes of daily life.

This brings me to an important observation about the Mass, which I encountered in the writings of Pope Pius XII. While the actions of the priest are strictly determined - to the point that people used to consider that the deliberate violation of the rubrics constituted a mortal sin - Pope Pius XII notes that we would pursue a bad goal if we required and expected that everyone *else* manage to participate in the Mass in exactly the same way and to exactly the same extent. Any of us may not be in the state of grace, or may have had to stay up late with a sick child, or to endure a squirming child in the pew beside us. Some of us are new Catholics, or new to this form of the rite, while others have enjoyed this rite for years.... and therefore – we must remember that our dispositions don't affect the validity of the Mass itself, even as they do have an impact on our own receptiveness to the graces of each Mass. There are some postures which are common customs, and I will note these as a group, later in this presentation.

Now that those basic points are behind us, I propose to start at the beginning of the High Mass and walk you through the various actions of this act of worship. Solemn High Masses are unusual events in this part of the Catholic world, but they're not unknown. Low Masses, on the other hand, are quite common for daily Mass and available at Five Wounds on Sunday mornings at 9:30, but not in the main church building.

### **Parts of the Mass:**

The procession into the Church having been completed, the celebrant is wearing a cope because before the Mass begins there is the rite called the *Asperges*, which is a sprinkling of the assembled faithful with holy water. During this ritual, the members of the choir (and congregation) sing a chant. The chant has four distinct sections: the antiphon, the psalm verse, the Gloria Patri, and the repetition of the antiphon. For most of the year the antiphon begins with the words *Asperges me hyssopo*, ("Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop") but during the Easter season the text begins *Vidi aquam egredientem de templo* ("I saw water flowing out from the temple"). Only a tiny portion of the psalm in each case is sung. When the actual sprinkling is completed, there is a brief dialogue/prayer which includes both the celebrant and the faithful. Take some time to "read, mark and inwardly digest" this prayer. The whole of the ceremony being complete, the celebrant exchanges the cope for a chasuble with the help of his servers, and the Mass begins with the "Prayers at the Foot of the Altar" which are, unsurprisingly, preparatory prayers prayed by priest and faithful before the priest ascends to the height of the altar.

Look carefully at the structure of the prayers at the foot of the altar. They begin with the sign of the Cross, are followed by an antiphon, verses of a psalm said, back and forth, by priest and servers, Gloria Patri and repetition of the antiphon. That should sound familiar, because it is nearly identical to

the form of the *Asperges*, although the psalm is different and there are now more verses said. Large sections of the Divine Office, the prayers prayed throughout the day, are organized around the same idea: antiphon, psalm, Gloria Patri, antiphon.

The first psalm being completed, priest and faithful exchange the greeting *Adjutorium nostrum in nomine Domini.....qui fecit caelum et terram*. (Our help is in the name of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth.) Notice that both the celebrant and the faithful make the sign of the cross, for both act in concert here. Immediately following, however, the priest makes a confession of his sinfulness *separately* from everyone else in the building. The faithful will get their own chance – and a good thing this is, too, because this confession can remit venial sin – but first they must do two things: they must listen to the priest (which is usually good advice) and they must invoke God’s mercy on him. After he has prayed, the faithful reply *Misereatur tui omnipotens Deus, et dimissis peccatis tuis, perducatur te in vitam aeternam*. “May the almighty God have mercy on you and, having dismissed your sins, bring you to life everlasting”. Then the faithful pray their own, distinct, Confiteor, and the celebrant first replies as we did to his (making all the singular “you”s plural) but then adds his sacerdotal blessing, not merely requesting but bestowing God’s forgiveness on us.

I want to dwell on the Confiteor for a few minutes, because there is much going on here. At one point in the Confiteor, first the celebrant and then, in their turn, the faithful, strike their breasts, proclaiming “*mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*”. We acknowledge our sinful actions and attitudes, and claim them for the purpose of being forgiven. We acknowledge them before specific members of the court of heaven: Almighty God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Michael the Archangel, St. John the Baptist, Sts. Peter and Paul...and then we include the celebrant, addressing him as “father”. When the priest prays this prayer, he includes us as “you, my brothers”. As he does this, he turns to us – as represented by the servers. The more elaborate the Mass, the more elaborate that ceremony is. You will see also that when the celebrant is flanked by servers, they turn to him, inwards, at this point. Priest and servers bow profoundly during the Confiteor. In the pews, the faithful are already kneeling, and a more profound bow of the body is hard – but a more profound decision to be sorry for our sins is not. In the confessional, we acknowledge our sins before God... but here we single out members of the court of heaven twice. The first time is in our acknowledgement of our sins. The second is in *asking for the prayers* of the heavenly court.

The Confiteor being concluded, a short dialogue ensues, at the end of which the celebrant invites us, saying “*Oremus*” – let us pray. Mounting the steps to the altar, he prays one prayer, which is almost inaudible even to the servers. He addresses the Lord, asking Him to take our sins away from us so that we can, with pure hearts and minds enter the place closest to God, the “Holy of Holies”. Reaching the top step, he kisses the altar, and asks that the Lord forgive *his* sins through the merits of the saint (or saints) whose relics are in the altar. The priest has entered the special sacerdotal zone. Only those who are seeing to the priest’s particular needs are supposed to approach this zone, and then only as long as their service is required.

While the prayers at the foot of the altar have been occurring, the members of the scola have been singing the Introit, the first of the day’s propers. I will come to a more detailed discussion of the

Propers in just a moment. For now, suffice it to say that the introit is followed by the singing of the *Kyrie Eleison*. Usually, the *Kyrie* begins as the prayers on the altar steps begin, but the timing isn't always that precise. *Kyrie Eleison* is sung three times; *Christe Eleison* is sung three times; *Kyrie Eleison* is sung three more times. The singing parallels (I was going to say "mimics", but that has a negative connotation) the speaking of the *Kyrie* which takes place on the altar. Three invocations of the Father, three invocations of the Son and finally three invocations of the Holy Ghost conclude this penitential aspect of the liturgy. Usually, but not always, the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* follows the *Kyrie*. (There is a time of year when the *Gloria* is not used).

Now it is time to discuss the Propers, all as a group. **Each one** is spoken or sung by the priest, and the appropriate ones are, additionally, sung by the choir. Those sung by the choir are, in order: Introit, Gradual, Alleluia (or Tract, in the proper season), Offertory and Communion. Those sung by the priest alone are, in order: the Collect, the Epistle, the Gospel, and the Post Communion. Spoken by the priest – and not sung – is the Secret. Unique among the propers is the Sequence (which doesn't show up often) because the chants are all *intended* to be sung by the lay faithful. Among the parts sung by the celebrant, there can be up to three Collects, three Secrets and three Post Communion prayers at any Mass. By order of Monsignor Giles Wach, priests of the Institute of Christ the King include a Collect, Secret and Post Communion for the Holy Father at every Mass except those when this practice is explicitly prohibited.

Let us look, now, at each of the Propers sung by the choir, in broad terms. The Introit, as I mentioned earlier, has an antiphon, a psalm verse, a Gloria Patri and a repetition of the antiphon. Since the introit used to involve the singing of the whole of a psalm, as many as three verses *can* be sung, but the priest still says only the one verse. The Gradual has a fixed form, regardless of whether it is sung or spoken. Taking as my example the Gradual for Trinity Sunday, it begins the text *Benedictus es, Domine* (Blessed art Thou, o Lord). A versicle (a little piece of a psalm, and marked with the V with the funny line through it, in your Missal) is sung after the antiphon is completed, but when the versicle has finished, the antiphon is *not* repeated. Also having a fixed form, the Alleluia (or, in season, the Tract) is sung immediately before the Gospel. You can tell that it has begun because the word Alleluia is said or sung twice; you can tell that it is nearly finished because this Alleluia is repeated, once at the end. The Offertory consists of an antiphon and *optional* verses. The priest says (but doesn't sing) the antiphon, and doesn't sing or say the verses. The Communion, likewise, consists of an antiphon and *optional* verses. As you might expect by now, the priest says this antiphon, but doesn't say any of the verses.

### **Practical, external participation**

There is so much more to discuss, but I want to turn my attention to *your* participation, under two headings: exterior and interior participation. I will start with exterior participation, and you might think of this as a guide called "how not to look like a foreigner". These observations don't come under the heading "Ten NEW Commandments". Remember that the priest's actions are *strictly* controlled, but those of the laity are not. They're intended to be helpful, and many of them have been hallowed by generations of practice.

At any Mass at least as solemn as a normal High Mass on Sunday, the ringing of a bell announces that the procession of the celebrant and servers is about to begin. At this point, stand. Some people observe the custom of genuflecting when the crucifix passes by their pew, and bowing when the priest (or multiple clergy) pass by their pew. It is a good custom and can be a properly pious practice, one I learned when I was first introduced to the traditional form of the Mass some years ago, but it isn't done by everyone. If the bishop is in the procession, he will bless you as he passes you, and so you kneel to receive the blessing, even though he doesn't stop the procession to bless individuals. As a remnant of this practice, of standing for the procession of the clergy and servers, even at a Low Mass, the faithful usually stand when the bell rings and the procession from sacristy to altar occurs.

During the *Asperges*, the priest will sprinkle people with Holy Water. It is customary to make the sign of the cross when sprinkled with Holy Water at all times, and this continues to be the practice at Mass. Some people know about this custom, and some do not. Some good Catholics think they should make the sign of the cross only if they are actually touched by droplets of the Holy Water, based on the premise that the blessing is bestowed by the sacramental, the holy water, and there is much merit in this thought. Speaking as a musician, when I play the organ I can not make the sign of the cross, and the celebrant rarely sprinkles those in the choir loft.

At the beginning of the prayers at the foot of the altar, the faithful kneel. At a High Mass, we stand as the celebrant intones the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, since it is a joyful hymn. At Low Mass, since the hymn is not sung, the faithful remain kneeling. At the High Mass, having stood for the *Gloria*, the faithful remain standing for the Collect, and sit for the Epistle. At Low Mass, having not stood for the *Gloria* the faithful usually remain kneeling until the proclamation of the Gospel. Only the choir stands for the Gradual and the Alleluia or Tract.

To honor Our Lord during the proclamation of the Gospel, the faithful stand. The cue to stand is the singing of the *Dominus Vobiscum*. We respond *Et Cum Spiritu Tuo*. We remain standing throughout the Gospel *unless the rubrics specifically call for something else, which, rarely, they do*. As the Gospel is announced, we make the sign of the cross over our mind, mouth and heart. Much symbolism has been attached to the three-fold sign of the cross and the places so signed, but a further discussion of that will have to wait for another day.

The Gospel proclamation being completed, we remain standing until one of the following happens: the Mass continues with the *Credo*; the Mass continues with *Dominus Vobiscum* at the start of the Offertory; the Mass comes to a pause, during which there is a sermon. If there is a sermon, the faithful usually sit when he who is to preach reaches the place from which he will preach. That may sound needlessly vague, but consider this: there are many allowable situations here, and they would take another talk to discuss completely.

During the *Credo*, all stand. At a Low Mass, following the celebrant, everyone kneels at the text *Et Incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto, ex Maria Virgine, et homo factus est*, and then everyone rises again. At a High Mass, the priest genuflects when he reaches that same text, and rises again, and the faithful follow the choir, who genuflect at the same place. AFTER this text, though, the faithful usually sit,

following the example of the priest, until the *Credo* is complete. The *Credo* marks the beginning of what is called the Mass of the Faithful, to distinguish it from the Mass of the Catechumens. Catechumens, learners, could not be present for the celebration of the great mysteries to be celebrated, and the Creed was -- and is -- the statement "I believe these things", and therefore belongs to the Mass of the Faithful. Accordingly, I will not go further than the *Credo* this evening, in terms of external participation.

Before I go on to interior participation, I want to highlight one particular aspect of service at the altar. Altar boys are taught that they have a dual role, in addition to offering the Mass themselves: to act to assist the priest at various times, and to act *for* us, by showing us by their actions what the priest has just said, since we can not reasonably be expected to hear every word, since every word is not addressed to us. When altar servers make the sign of the cross during the prayers at the foot of the altar, we should do likewise. When they strike their breasts during the *Confiteor*, we should do likewise. When they bow their heads at the name of Jesus, we should do likewise. You will see them make the sign of the cross during the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, and bow reverently during the words *suscipe deprecationem nostram...* and we should follow them in these gestures. We should, similarly, make the sign of the cross at the end of the *Credo*, at the words *et vitam venturi saeculi*.

These gestures, initially external, signal a kind of internal awareness of the significance of the words. We pray those celebrated words of the Our Father long before we internalize the reality: "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us"; in like manner, doing the gestures comes before understanding and full-throated rumination on their meaning. That is quite to be expected -- in fact, it is abnormal when full understanding precedes saying the words. Here's an analogy: long before a child can explain math concepts, he learns math facts; in the same way, a child hears language spoken and learns as a baby by hearing and imitating, not by studying the rules of grammar and spelling in a systematic way.

Internal participation assumes preparation. Here are some ways I recommend to assist your interior participation: pray the Morning Offering, so that you have offered the whole day to God. Read the Propers, whether before you leave to come to Mass or when you arrive, quietly. Parents: read these to your children, even if you start with the Epistle and Gospel. Examine your conscience, so that you know whether you may receive Christ sacramentally or whether you must, rather, make a spiritual communion. As immediate preparation for Mass, pray some specific prayer (the Red Missals have some excellent ones) or some psalm, so that you can properly focus on loving God and preparing to receive from Him the tremendous gift of the Mass. Do *not* attempt to keep up with every word Father says, because you will see the trees and miss the forest. Keep up with what you can.

Remembering that there are four purposes for the Mass (Adoration, Thanksgiving, Petition and Satisfaction or Reparation), you should recognize that these are acts of the Will. I choose to adore God (or not, as the case may be). Sometimes you might be particularly grateful to God, and so your interior disposition is one of thankfulness to God. Sometimes you will be in great physical or spiritual pain, or be experiencing spiritual dryness. These are simply part of the human condition. That brings me to one last consideration for preparation for interior participation: call upon your guardian angel and your patron saints. These have already arrived in heaven, and want to help you get there.

I will close my presentation this evening with two reflections. The first is a story about St. Augustine. He was thinking about the Blessed Trinity on one occasion when he caught sight of a boy trying to put the whole of the ocean into a small bucket. Manifestly this was impossible, and the saint told the little boy this. The little boy replied that in the same fashion Augustine could not expect to learn all there was to know about God: his mind was too small, and the reality of God simply too large. In the same way, we should not impose upon ourselves the need to understand everything about the Mass in the same way we know smaller, less intricate facts. Rather, we should expect, if we cooperate with the grace God gives us, to grow in the knowledge, understanding and love of God and His enduring gift of the Mass. To quote the famous English convert, John Henry Newman, in a text written before he had embraced the faith, "I loved to choose, and see my path, but now, Lead Thou me on". He continues, "Lead Thou me on: Keep thou my feet: I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me". Next time, we will take another step.