

THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS & *Summorum Pontificum*

In a prior role as editor of the Latin Liturgy Association quarterly newsletter, I determined to set quarterly publication dates for the newsletter according to certain liturgical feast days: Immaculate Conception, Annunciation, Nativity of St. John the Baptist, and Exaltation of the Holy Cross. This latter choice of 9/14 seemed especially appropriate because of the correlation of the liturgy of the day to the Sacrifice of the Mass and the selection of that same day for the implementation of *Summorum Pontificum* which freed the Traditional Latin Mass from many restrictions imposed upon it. I would like now to speculate upon the rationale of Benedict XVI for his choices of 7/7/7 to issue the *motu proprio* in question and of September 14th for its implementation. This is pure speculation – so please indulge me!

Few will argue against the proposition that the Traditional Latin Mass emphasizes the Good Friday sacrifice, whereas the Mass of Paul VI emphasizes the Holy Thursday meal. If you do not agree with this proposition, I offer only the following excerpt from The Spirit of the Liturgy by then Cardinal (and Prefect of CDF) Ratzinger, pages 77-78:

“Today celebration *versus populum* really does look like the characteristic fruit of Vatican II’s liturgical renewal. In fact it is the most conspicuous consequence of a reordering that not only signifies a new external arrangement of the places dedicated to the liturgy, but also brings with it a new idea of the essence of the liturgy – the liturgy as a communal meal...the Eucharist that Christians celebrate really cannot adequately be described by the term “meal”. True, the Lord established the new reality of Christian worship within the framework of a Jewish (Passover) meal, but it was precisely this new reality, not the meal as such, that he commanded us to repeat. Very soon the new reality was separated from its ancient context and found its proper and suitable form, a form already predetermined by the fact that the Eucharist refers back to the Cross and thus to the transformation of Temple sacrifice into worship of God. ...”

If we look at the Gospel reading in the 1962 Missal for 9/14, we find it is from John's Gospel, chapter 12, verses 31-36. It begins as follows:

At that time, Jesus said to the multitude of the Jews,
'Now is the judgment of the world: now shall the
prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up
from the earth, shall draw all things to myself.'
(Now this He said, signifying what death He should die.)

Note that he is speaking to the Jews about judgment and casting out evil by his death on the cross, which will make salvation possible. (The Latin says *omnia traham*, that is, I will draw all. There is no specific object in the text and so “things” or “men” are often added in translations. A related verse from St. John's Revelation (21:5) is handled the same way – “And he that sat on the throne, said: Behold, I make all things new.”) The emphasis on sacrifice is also evident in Church discipline. We are required to witness this sacrifice on our behalf every Sunday and Holy Day of obligation, whereas we are required to receive Holy Communion but once a year. Since there is no Mass on Good Friday, this feast provides a day in the liturgical calendar to celebrate that supreme sacrifice. It was formerly a class I feast on a par with the Holy Days of obligation. (It is one of the Twelve Great Feasts of the Byzantine Rite.) Today, if it occurs on a Sunday, it overrides that Sunday's liturgy. So, the choice of this date for the implementation of the *motu proprio* is fitting and deliberate.

Is the choice of 7/7/7 for the issuance of the *motu proprio* also deliberate, and, if so, how? Only Benedict XVI knows for sure. Speculation is more tenuous, but I think a case can be made for the following if we relate the issuance date to the feast date. '7' is a sacred number to the Hebrews. Many instances of '7' may be found in the Old Testament beginning with on the seventh day He rested and so has sanctified that day as the Sabbath. But I wish to reference only one other such instance because of its relation to God's judgment, purging evil, and expiation via sacrifice. The text is from II Chronicles, chapters 28 and 29. I would ask you to consider this text in conjunction with the following abbreviated quote from Cardinal Ratzinger's address to the Chilean bishops immediately after the issuance in 1988 of *Ecclesia Dei adflicta*, Saint John Paul II's *motu proprio*, that expanded the possibilities of the so-called “Indult Mass” which Pope Benedict XVI later titled the “Extraordinary Form.” The Prefect of CDF said to the bishops:

“While there are many motives that might have led a great number of people to seek a refuge in the

THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS & *Summorum Pontificum*

traditional liturgy, the chief one is that they find the dignity of the sacred preserved there. After the Council there were many priests who deliberately raised 'desacralization' to the level of a program,... they put aside the sacred vestments; they have despoiled the churches as much as they could of that splendor which brings to mind the sacred; and they have reduced the liturgy to the language and the gestures of ordinary life, by means of greetings, common signs of friendship, and such things... That which previously was considered most holy -- the form in which the liturgy was handed down -- suddenly appears as the most forbidden of all things, the one thing that can safely be prohibited."

With this in mind, I will now abridge II Chronicles, 28 and 29 as follows:

All the ornaments of the Lord's house he (Achaz) had already taken away and broken up; now he closed the temple doors, and built altars of his own in every corner of Jerusalem; altars, too, in every city of Juda, the smoke of whose incense enraged the Lord, the God of his fathers.... And the throne passed to his son Ezechias. Now Ezechias began to reign, when he was five and twenty years old,... And he did that which was pleasing in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done. In the first year and month of his reign he opened the doors of the house of the Lord, and repaired them. And he brought the priests and the Levites, and assembled them in the east street. And he said to them: Hear me, ye Levites, and be sanctified, purify the house of the Lord the God of your fathers, and take away all filth out of the sanctuary. Our fathers have sinned and done evil in the sight of the Lord God, forsaking him: they have turned away their faces from the tabernacle of the Lord, and turned their backs. They have shut up the doors that were in the porch, and put out the lamps, and have not burnt incense, nor offered holocausts in the sanctuary of the God of Israel. Therefore the wrath of the Lord hath been stirred up against Juda and Jerusalem, and he hath delivered them to trouble, and to destruction, and to be hissed at, as you see with your eyes.... Now therefore I have a mind that we make a covenant with the Lord the God of Israel, and he will turn away the wrath of his indignation from us. My sons, be not negligent: the Lord hath chosen you to stand before him, and to minister to him, and to worship him, and to burn incense to him. Then the Levites arose,... And they gathered together their brethren, and sanctified themselves, and went in according to the commandment of the king, and the precept of the Lord, to purify the house of God. And the priests went into the temple of the Lord to sanctify it, and brought out all the uncleanness that they found within to the entrance of the house of the Lord, and the Levites took it away, and carried it out abroad to the torrent Cedron.... And they went in to king Ezechias, and said to him: We have sanctified all the house of the Lord, and the altar of holocaust, and the vessels thereof, and the table of proposition with all its vessels, And all the furniture of the temple, which king Achaz in his reign had defiled, after his transgression; and behold they are all set forth before the altar of the Lord. And king Ezechias rising early, assembled all the rulers of the city, and went up into the house of the Lord: And they offered together seven bullocks, and seven rams, and seven lambs, and seven he goats for sin, for the kingdom, for the sanctuary, for Juda: and he spoke to the priests the sons of Aaron, to offer them upon the altar of the Lord. Therefore they killed the bullocks, and the priests took the blood, and poured it upon the altar; they killed also the rams, and their blood they poured also upon the altar, and they killed the lambs, and poured the blood upon the altar. And they brought the he goats for sin before the king, and the whole multitude, and they laid their hand upon them: And the priests immolated them, and sprinkled their blood before the altar for an expiation of all Israel: for the king had commanded that the holocaust and the sin offering should be made for all Israel. And he set the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, and psalteries, and harps according to the regulation of David the king, and of Gad the seer, and of Nathan the prophet: for it was the commandment of the Lord by the hand of his prophets.... And when the oblation was ended, the king, and all that were with him bowed down and adored.

Clearly, this text is about restoring a form of worship in the Temple "according to the regulation of David, the king..." that had been neglected with unfortunate consequences. It involves purification of the Temple, its vessels, and furnishings. It requires sacrificial offerings (3 x 7) to God and one immolation of "he goats" for the expiation of sin. It restores the "dignity of the sacred." Did Benedict XVI have this text in mind? He certainly was aware of it. And we are free to speculate why he might have chosen 7/7/7 and 9/14.