

## INSTRUCTION #7 – The Sense of the Sacred

You may remember that in our earlier talks about the beauty of Psalm 42 and the Last Gospel, I quoted then Cardinal Ratzinger on the reason for the resurgence of the Traditional Latin Mass. He said:

“While there are many motives that might have led a great number of people to seek a refuge in the traditional liturgy, the chief one is that they find the dignity of the sacred preserved there.”<sup>1</sup>

There is an inescapable conclusion to be drawn from this statement, namely, that same “great number of people” do not find the “dignity of the sacred preserved,” at least not to the same extent, in the Mass of Paul VI. Consequently, they “seek a refuge” - as Cardinal Ratzinger said – in this Mass. I would like to take up this theme again this week by examining how, besides the missing Psalm 42 and Last Gospel, the “dignity of the sacred” is preserved in the Traditional Latin Mass.

Certainly, one of the components of the sacred is the characteristic of reverence. We reverence someone or something in various ways. We can bow, bless, or genuflect, for instance. If we compare the two missals; the *Missale Romanum* of 1962 that stands there on the altar, and the *Missale Romanum* of 1970 that we use for the Mass of Paul VI, what would we find in this regard? First, because the two Mass forms are different and the Traditional Latin Mass has little variation, we have to choose options in the Mass of Paul VI that make it as close to this Mass as possible. For instance, we choose to say Eucharistic Prayer #1 because it is similar to the Roman Canon of this Mass. We choose to say the Confiteor in the Mass of Paul VI because we are required to say it in this Mass. Note that we are omitting the Proper parts, that is, the readings because they vary from week to week in each form. We are only examining the Ordinary part of each Mass. Both Missals instruct the priest at those points where he is to perform a reverence. So, if we count these types of instructions to the priest during the course of the Mass in each Missal, the results are as follows:

1. In the Mass of Paul VI I bow profoundly 3 times. In this Mass I also bow profoundly 3 times.
2. I genuflect 3 times in the Mass of Paul VI. In this Mass I genuflect 17 times.
3. I kiss the altar twice in the Mass of Paul VI. In this Mass I kiss the altar 9 times.
4. In the Mass of Paul VI, I bow the head once. In this Mass I bow the head 22 times.
5. I bow slightly 5 times in the Mass of Paul VI. In this Mass I bow slightly 10 times.
6. I strike my breast 4 times in the Mass of Paul VI. In this Mass I strike my breast 10 times.
7. Remember that both forms of the Mass are the same Sacrifice of the Cross offered in an unbloody way. In the Mass of Paul the VI, I make 8 signs of the cross. In the Traditional Latin Mass I make 52 signs of the cross.

These are all external signs of reverence that you can see for yourself if you observe closely. But there are other signs of reverence that I perform that you may not be able to see from the pews. I experience them, because I do them. For instance, after the Consecration, the rules of the 1962 Missal require me to keep the thumb and forefinger of each hand joined together [Demonstrate this.] until they are purified with wine and water after Holy Communion. They have touched God. It seems very fitting to me that they should touch nothing else while a

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trace of the Body of Christ might remain on them. So, I have begun to do this in the Mass of Paul VI, which does not require it. I also cover the chalice with something called a pall whenever possible. This is a sign of regard for the Precious Blood. Consider that Mass may be offered in situations outside of a church, at an outdoor shrine, or, during war, even on a battlefield. Contamination of the Precious Blood is avoided by the use of the pall, which is not required by the Mass of Paul VI.

I suspect that you experience the sense of the sacred in the manner in which Holy Communion is provided. Instead of standing and receiving in the hand as most do in the Mass of Paul VI, this Mass requires you to kneel and receive on the tongue. Certainly this is a more humble posture toward the Real Presence. Something you might consider, especially as we continue the Lenten season – the required fast for Holy Communion is only one hour. This was reduced from three hours by Paul VI in order to make more frequent Communion easier – a praiseworthy objective. In 1962 however, when the Traditional Latin Mass was the only Mass anywhere, the fast was three hours. I have been told that some of the people who attend the Traditional Latin Mass still observe this fast, and still others, the even older fast from midnight. As I said, we are only required to fast one hour, but isn't a longer fast also an indication of reverence for what is sacred?

In the Traditional Latin Mass, only a priest or a deacon, that is, someone invested with the special graces of Holy Orders, is allowed to distribute Holy Communion. There are no Extraordinary Ministers in this Mass. Holy Communion seems to take longer. I use the word “seems” because, while I know that the actual distribution effort is longer with only one priest (as is our situation at this parish), I also know that no time is spent preparing chalices and ciboriums for Extraordinary Ministers to use for distribution and very little time is spent purifying the sacred vessels after distribution. Since Holy Communion in this Mass is only in the form of the sacred Host, I have only my chalice to purify, which takes very little time. Far more important than whatever time may be spent for Holy Communion, there is very little risk of spilling the Precious Blood, since only my chalice is used and only by me. This concern for the Precious Blood is another instance of a very visible regard for the Real Presence. And nothing is more sacred than the Real Presence.

In another of these instructions, I talked about the orientation of the priest and you may remember the Latin phrase *ad orientem*. We also talked at that time about a common orientation of the priest and people when they were engaged in worshiping God together. As a newcomer to this way of celebrating Mass, in a sacred language and *ad orientem*, I sense much more that we are worshiping God together than when I am facing you in the Mass of Paul VI and saying words in English that are principally addressed to God the Father.

All of the outward signs that I have discussed, both express our deep reverence for the mystery of faith we celebrate, and strengthen our inner sense of the sacred. As then Cardinal Ratzinger said “the dignity of the sacred” is indeed “preserved” in the “traditional liturgy.” I invite you to “take refuge” here at St. Barnabas every Sunday.

1 Address to the Bishops of Chile, July 13, 1988