

## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE TRADITIONAL LATIN MASS

This Introduction identifies the more obvious differences between the Mass of Paul VI (the “Ordinary Form”), and the Traditional Latin Mass (the “Extraordinary Form”). The format of this introduction is as follows:

- *A difference is identified between the Mass of Paul VI and the Traditional Latin Mass (TLM).*
  - The difference is explained.
  - As needed, the rationale for the difference is summarized.
1. *At the beginning of Mass, Father and the servers say a significant number of prayers at the foot of the altar.*

The prayers are Psalm 42, the Confiteor, the absolution, and four versicles from other psalms.

In Psalm 42 David says he will go into the altar of God to offer sacrifice and praise (upon his harp). David, at the time of the psalm, has been usurped as king by his son Absalom. The Messiah will come from the house of David. Christ too will be hailed as “King of the Jews” and then crucified. David is a “type” of Christ. Psalm 42 links Old Testament worship to the Mass and prefigures the coming of the Messiah. Christ will be made present on the altar at the Consecration.

The Confiteor is occasionally said in the Mass of Paul VI, but not usually. It is always said in the TLM. Father acknowledges his sinfulness and unworthiness to do what he is about to do. The servers (on behalf of the people) ask for mercy upon Father and then confess their own sinfulness. Father absolves them (and us) of venial sins before continuing with the Mass.

The four versicles end with “Lord hear my prayer, and let my cry come unto Thee.” This is spoken just before Father ascends to the altar.

2. *Father says almost all his words facing the altar, not the people.*

Nearly all of Father's words are addressed to God. Most of these are addressed to the First Person of the Trinity. Father performs the Mass *in persona Christi* that is, in the person of the Second Person of the Trinity.

We should not think in terms of “Father has his back to me.” Rather, we should think in terms of “Father is praying with and for me to God.” Father's focus, and ours, should be there. Incidentally, the original instructions to the priest for saying the Mass of Paul VI, instruct Father to **turn to face the people** at several points, because it was assumed he would normally face the same direction as the people. In some churches, the Mass of Paul VI is celebrated *versus deum* (towards God). It is perfectly correct to do so. (Consider also that if the tabernacle is on or behind the altar, and Father is facing the people, he would have his back to the Real Presence of Christ in the tabernacle.)

3. *Father speaks only Latin.*

Latin is the universal language of the Church (since before 400AD).

Unlike the vernacular languages, the meaning of any word in Latin does not change over time. It is timeless. In Advent of 2011 a new translation was issued for the Mass of Paul VI in English (and other languages) partly because of a poor translation dating from 1973 and partly because of the instability of the vernacular. Imagine going to Mass in Bavaria if you do not speak German. Imagine Beijing if you do not speak Mandarin. The TLM is the same in Boston, Bavaria, Beijing, or wherever. This year, next year, and so on. The Mass of Paul VI was written in Latin and translated (sometimes poorly) into the many vernacular versions. It may be said in Latin, too.

4. *Communion is distributed only with the host, only on the tongue, and kneeling.*

That was, in 1962, the universal law of the Church. The U.S. has been issued an “indult”, that is, a special permission to distribute both species, to receive in the hand, and to receive standing.

Note also, Father says (in Latin) to every communicant: “May the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve thy soul unto life eternal. Amen.” We do **not** respond with a second “Amen.”

5. *There are no Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.*

The rules for saying the Mass of 1962 (and before) only allowed priests and deacons to distribute

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Holy Communion. Those rules still apply. It is the same Mass.

6. *After the Creed there are extended Offertory prayers before the “Holy, Holy, Holy....”*  
The gifts are prayed over and sanctified AS OFFERINGS before they are transformed at the Consecration into the supreme sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ.  
Consider what might be said in offering gifts to God on our behalf. If Christ had not established the unbloody Sacrifice of the Mass on Holy Thursday, what would we say to God when we offered Him bread and wine as our gifts, as Melchisedech did in the Old Testament?
7. *There is only one “Eucharistic Prayer”.*  
There was only one from about 400AD until 1970.  
It is called the Roman Canon and the “finishing touches” were made to it by Pope St. Gregory the Great around 600AD. It is the prayer that most of the saints of the Church heard, read, or said while they lived.
8. *Father genuflects and bows and kisses the altar more than he does at the other Mass.*  
There are many more signs of deference and humility before God in the TLM.  
Something you may not notice unless you watch closely is that Father keeps the thumbs and forefingers of both hands joined after the Consecration until he washes his fingers after Communion over the chalice. He does this because they have touched God and that is their only purpose until Communion is over.
9. *The music is different.*  
The High Mass is sung in Gregorian Chant (named after the same Pope St. Gregory the Great).  
The only document issued by Vatican Council II regarding the liturgy is entitled *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. It says the following:  
116. The Church recognizes Gregorian chant as being specially suited to the Roman liturgy. Therefore, other things being equal, it should be given pride of place in liturgical services.  
and:  
54. A suitable place may be allotted to the vernacular in Masses which are celebrated with the people, especially in the readings and “the common prayer” .... Nevertheless, care must be taken to ensure that the faithful may also be able to say or sing together in Latin those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them.
10. *The Mass does not end with the blessing and “Go forth in peace.” There is an extra reading at the end.*  
The extra reading is the Prologue to St. John's Gospel and it is said in every TLM.  
A famous liturgical scholar named Joseph Jungmann, S.J. said the following in his masterwork – *The Mass of the Roman Rite, Its Origins and Development (Vol 2, p. 447)*:

“It is certainly remarkable that at the close of the Roman Mass a gospel pericope should be read. But if we go back to its origin, we find that this reading harmonizes with the series of dismissal rites and more particularly with the blessings. The prolog of the Gospel according to St. John, with the exalted flight of its ideas and the profundity of its mysteries was accorded an extraordinary esteem even in the early church. Augustine quotes the saying of a contemporary of his that this text ought to be placed in gold letters at some prominent place in all the churches.

The prolog of St. John is rightly regarded as a summary of the Gospel, the divine power of which is, in a measure, concentrated there.”

The Prologue tells of creation, of the Incarnation, of the rejection of Christ, and of our redemption. Father has just made God present again on the altar at this Mass, not as a man, but under the appearance of bread and wine as nourishment for our souls. The Prologue is a fitting capstone to the “Mass of the Ages.”