

WHY THE SACRED MUST TRIUMPH

The following commentary is anecdotal. It is not an empirical double-blind study – not even close. Rather, it presents the effects that attendance at their very first Traditional Latin Mass (TLM) in 2010 produced on 18 of 63 sophomore boys at an all-boys Catholic high school. It presents these effects in their own words, which I have excerpted from their two-page essays.

These papers were part of an assignment in a theology course on the sacraments: first, attend a TLM (at a location of their choice); second, write a two-page paper on the experience; and third, listen to an 80-minute presentation by this author (who also had the privilege of reading and commenting on their papers). The agent behind this assignment was a deacon with an open mind about the TLM. I had seen many of his students (in school jackets) in the early weeks of 2003 at the TLM that my family was attending. Since I went to the same high school forty years before, I had asked one of them about his coming to a TLM. So I learned about the deacon, whom we will call "Deacon X" and their assignment.

My own involvement was occasioned rather inauspiciously. At one of these Masses, just a couple of pews in front of us, a pair of these students were "cutting up" – talking and joking, evidently amused at the proceedings. After Mass I stepped out of my pew in front of the first student that had left his pew and turned to exit the church and said to him – "My 2 year old grandson behaves better at Mass than you do." I confirmed with him that he was in Deacon X's class. There was now fear and trembling in his voice, and I subsequently learned that he had apologized to the Deacon for his behavior. This exchange, after inquiries on his part, prompted the Deacon's phone call to me. My participation continued for another nine years through March of 2012.

In assigning them a paper, the Deacon gave them a handout which asked them to address the following questions:

1. At what church was the Mass celebrated?
2. What were some of the differences between this Latin mass and the Mass celebrated in your church (e.g. movements of the priest, decorations, altar set up, type of music, the role of the servers, use of bells)?
3. How would you characterize the mood of the Mass compared to the Mass that you attend in your parish?
4. Were the people dressed any differently attending this Mass?
5. What role did the congregation play at this Mass?
6. In what language were the readings done?
7. Why do you think people attend this type of Mass?
8. Did anything surprise you, disturb you, or cause you to wonder?
9. Would you like to celebrate the Mass in this way more often? Why? Why not?

In 2021 the *motu proprio*, *Traditionis Custodes* was issued by Pope Francis. It is so full of misconceptions about the TLM and those who attend it that I determined to resurrect my notes from this 10-year exercise with 15 and 16 year old boys. Their "first impressions" refute any claims of merely "nostalgic" attachment by the elderly to this form of worship because the same elders were nurtured on the TLM many years past. Their comments also attest to the deficiencies of the *Novus Ordo Missae* (NOM) which is the only Latin Rite Mass they had experienced before this assignment. These are not the observations of confirmed ("rigid") traditionalists, but of children completely unfamiliar with the TLM. As I re-read these "first impressions" I was struck by their cogency, their candor, and their awe. I hope you are too.

Please note: I have made a few editorial entries in brackets [] where grammar / sense required them.

1.

Latin Masses truly make going to Mass much more special through their solemnity, and this solemnity allows for me to fully realize how important the Eucharist really is. In the future, I will try to go to Latin Masses whenever possible so that I might be able to take part in such a transcendent Mass again. PD

2.

I had never received the Eucharist in anything but my palm before, and receiving it on the tongue allowed me to more experience the greatness of God and Jesus, that I can't even touch His blessed body. KC

3.

I also wondered at how people had had Mass like this for centuries and still do, but not as frequently. This kind of devotion seems to be uncommon, especially in today's modern world. GC

4.

I would like to celebrate Mass like this more often, because the more I do, the more I feel a deeper connection to the church. The Mass seemed more reverent than ours, like we have drifted a little bit and it's always nice to be guided back to our roots, to our "home". NB

5.

But the most effective difference I thought helped enhance the worship was surprisingly the priest not facing us. At first consideration, I just thought it took away from the sense of community, losing the inward focus with each other as God's children. But actually, I think this is better in some ways. With the priest facing forward, everyone present is looking onward and upward towards God. And that is where the focus should really be. EC

6.

I think that people go to this type of Mass because it is so tranquil. Everything is very mellow and smooth. It seems like it's a good place to relax and to get in touch with God because there aren't many distractions. That is why I liked it a lot. MC

7.

It [the Latin Mass] ended up being much more reverent than our normal Masses. I thought that the people at this Mass knew that they were there for worshiping God only. Sometimes at our regular Masses I can tell that some people don't want to be there. This wasn't the case for the Latin Mass. While I'm sure the people there weren't perfect, I definitely felt that they were better aware of God's presence in the Mass than the normal crowd. TG

8.

Sometimes I get distract[ed] during Mass at my home parish, but at this Latin Mass at St. [name omitted] I was able to focus in on my faith because I was not connected to the rest of the congregation. The music, people and general setting all helped me to feel closer to God than I have in quite a long time, just because it put God into the spotlight without any competition from family, ex-girlfriends and loud music. SK

9.

It [the Latin Mass] brought on a sense that it was just me and God. It seemed like there was a lot less focus on the priest and [more] toward the Tabernacle....It was a perfect environment to reflect and pray. PM

10.

It gave me this feeling that I never felt before in me and looking at the cross and amazing decorations, it was like [as] if God was talking to me through all of those things. And even

though I was new to the church or an outsider I felt welcome by the people there too, through the music and by the fact that I got to spend such wonderful time with them. AN

11.

There is greater reverence at the Latin Mass because everybody is very serious at Mass. On a normal Sunday, I will usually see people whispering at Mass and some teenagers will occasionally try to hide themselves text messaging or doing other stuff on their cell phones. I did not see any of that. Nobody was talking or ever looked at their cell phone. Everything is done formally and people are there to worship God, not because they are supposed to be there every Sunday. MS

12.

I was taken [a]back by the unbelievable amount of reverence shown by the congregation. Up until this Mass in my life, I don't really think I've connected to God through a Mass that strongly.... I would really like to attend more Masses in the Latin Rite because it really hit home on a personal level for me. The connection I felt with God was much greater in the Latin Rite, and it is easier for me to focus on what's important when others around me are doing the same. PS

13.

The Mass was a very peaceful experience and there was also a tangible sense of reverence for the sacrifice of the Mass that I hardly ever feel at my parish.... The Last Gospel is read at the end of every Latin Mass and is taken from the first chapter of St. John's Gospel which gives the theological background of Christ's life by explaining the incarnation. I think the message contained in those few verses of the Gospel according to John is so powerful, important, and inspiring that it should be included in every Mass. DL

14.

Overall I learned a lot about being reverent in church, and it really made me question why we have lost that in our typical Mass. I couldn't even understand this one, but it seemed like I've learned so much from it and the people who celebrated it with me. I am considering attending this Mass often because I think that the level of reverence and glory given to God is just so amazing and enjoyable to be a part of. BS

15.

This way of Communion made my experience of the Body of Christ much more personal and sacred. As if it was too holy to be touch[ed] by my unclean and sinful hands. I guess you can even say it taught me to be more reverent to God. DH

16.

I think that receiving the Eucharist by the mouth and not by the hands is very reverent and we as Catholics have lost that for the most part in the Masses that we celebrate every Sunday.

MB

17.

It was very quiet and solemn, and, if you were to talk, the people would turn around and look at you. It was probably one of the neatest things to be a part of. To see the reverence displayed at this Mass really was cool to me. AP

18.

I would definitely like to learn more about Latin Masses and really understand everything that is happening during this Mass. It was a great opportunity to experience something new and really helped me to grow closer to God in a very reverent and solemn way. DW

As you can see from these effects, the boys were significantly affected by their experience of the TLM even though there was a great deal that they did not understand. Theirs is a testimony to the universal power of the TLM. And while the different form of the TLM together

with the use of Latin may be difficult for the neophyte to fully comprehend, nonetheless, the silence, the language of the body with its bows and genuflections, the orientation of everyone toward the tabernacle, the reception of Holy Communion on the tongue and on one's knees, and the Gregorian chant – these are all intelligible to any one with an open mind. They inevitably connote the SACRED.

So – what of the first impressions of the other 45 students? Admittedly, I chose to record those that struck me as amazing at the time and most illustrative of clearly beneficial results. While I made no effort to categorize them at the time, I would posit that a standard bell-curve distribution is likely. There were probably about another 18 that were very negative and 27 or so that were indifferent or just completing an assignment, like the two boys mentioned at the outset. Still, regardless of distribution, if nearly 30% of our children can be so taken with the TLM by virtue of only ONE Mass, how can Holy Mother Church fail to make it available for the salvation of their souls, much less try to obliterate it by an unjust law? These lads were not "rigid" nor did they concern themselves with the orthodoxy or ambiguity of the documents of Vatican Council II, much less the perverted implementation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

I am reminded of the concluding question in an assignment from a previous year that I wish I had completely saved. But I remember clearly that it ended with "Why did they ever change it?" Why, indeed.