

INSTRUCTION #3 – The Conclusion

If you were here last week, you know that I talked:

- about the beginning of the Traditional Latin Mass with Psalm 42,
- about David as a “type” for the Messiah, and,
- how the Psalm links Old Testament worship to the New Covenant and the Sacrifice of the Mass.

Today, I would like to examine its conclusion, and talk to you about the Last Gospel. The Mass of Paul VI ends with the blessing, but the Traditional Latin Mass adds another reading after the blessing – the first 14 verses of St. John's Gospel. (These may be found on p.26 if you want to follow along in the St. Barnabas Hand Missal.) Why does the Traditional Latin Mass end this way?

If we examine the opening of St. John's Gospel, we find the assertion that Christ, the Word, was in the beginning with God, a coequal in the creation, because He is, indeed, the same God. St. John says –

“In him was life, and the life was the light of men, and the light shineth in darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it.”

Remember that in Psalm 42 David prayed for God to “send forth Thy light and Thy truth” to enlighten the rebellious Israelites. But before the coming of the Messiah, even David and the loyal Israelites remained in “the darkness” and did not fully comprehend the plan of salvation. St. John continues –

“That was the true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world.”

The light of truth leads every receptive man to a belief in one God. David knew this, but had little, if any, idea of how the Messiah would present Himself to the chosen people, or when it would happen. St. John says –

“He came unto His own, and they received Him not.”

In Psalm 42 we found that David, too, was rejected by his own people. In Christ's case, the Jews were anticipating another military leader, like David, to relieve them from the “enemy” that afflicted them at that time, the Romans. They were not anticipating a Savior to redeem them from the “Enemy” (with a capital 'E') who afflicts all men throughout time and who “prowls about the world seeking the ruin of souls.”

What form would this redemption take? St. John says –

“But as many as received Him, He gave them power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in His name.”

He is indeed the “salvation of my countenance and my God”, as David said in Psalm 42, but, He is so in a manner which David could not even imagine. The Incarnation has elevated human nature from its fallen state and has made it possible for those who receive Him and believe in Him, to become heirs of the Almighty – through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ. St.

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John continues –

“Who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

This distinguishing of those saved from those condemned is consistent with David’s prayer to distinguish his case from that of unholy men. But whereas David expected his loyal followers to be distinguished from those of Absalom, and for the Jews to be distinguished from the Gentiles, the Messiah did not come only for the “chosen people”, those born of a particular bloodline. Nor did He come only for those born in carnal desire, the “will of the flesh.” Nor did He come only for those conceived because of a determination to have offspring, “the will of man.” He came for any and all of the above who, as St. John says, “received Him,” “that believe in his name,” and are born again “of God”. St. John concludes –

“And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we saw his glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.”

As Psalm 42 asked God to “send forth Thy light and Thy truth,” the Last Gospel looks back on salvation history and describes for us just how that prayer was answered – by the Incarnation.

So, Psalm 42 at the beginning and the Last Gospel at the end of the Traditional Latin Mass form “bookends” around the essential part of any Mass, the coming of Christ and the sacrificing of Christ upon the altar at the Consecration. The Word became flesh once, to redeem man from his fallen state, and now the Word becomes present at every Mass under the appearance of bread and wine, to aid man through this life to the next. The aid takes two forms. First, “the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world,” continues to sacrifice Himself on our behalf in every Mass, earning for mankind infinite grace. And second, when the Sacrament is also received, the soul of the individual believer is nourished and directed toward God.

Father Joseph Jungmann, S.J., a famous scholar of the liturgy and a participant at Vatican II, said that Psalm 42 appeared in the Mass in the tenth century¹ and that the first record of the Last Gospel being used at the conclusion of Mass dates from a Dominican Order of Mass in the thirteenth century². He also says this about the Last Gospel³ (quote):

“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.”

If so, perhaps we should be asking a different question – “Why would you not end the Mass with the Last Gospel?” It seems clear why these bookends have formed the setting for the Traditional Latin Mass for centuries – because throughout the ages, as it developed, the Holy Spirit informed the Traditional Latin Mass with salvation history, in order to inform us about the mystery of our faith. As Pope Benedict said – “the dignity of the sacred is preserved there.”

- 1 J. A. Jungmann, S. J. – *The Mass of the Roman Rite* – Vol.1, p. 293
- 2 *Ibid.* Vol 2, p. 448
- 3 *Ibid.* Vol 2, p. 447