

THE TLM ORDINARY - BOOKENDS

ORDINARY: BOOKENDS (Introduction)

If we examine the part of the Mass that you hear at nearly every Traditional Latin Mass (TLM) – the text of the Ordinary Part of the Mass – we find this takes the same shape throughout the year with very few exceptions, for instance when there is a procession before Mass as on Candlemas and Palm Sunday. In these cases the Mass begins with the Introit rather than the Prayers at the Foot. Similarly, nearly all Masses end with the Last Gospel (John 1:1-14), Palm Sunday being an exception again, where those Masses that do not include the blessing of palms and procession have a "proper" last gospel (Matthew 21:1-9, the same as the gospel from the procession Mass). For the rest, the Mass begins with the Prayers at the Foot (abbreviated in Passiontide by the omission of Psalm 42) and ends with the Last Gospel. These two texts, one Old Testament and one New Testament, serve a useful purpose, like bookends. You might prefer the terms "prologue" and "epilogue" but for simplicity's sake I am going to call them "bookends" since they bind the main subject, the Mass of the day, which, long ago, began immediately with the Introit reading (chanted) and ended with a blessing and dismissal.

In the *Novus Ordo Missae* (NOM), about the only thing that you can count on being the same at the beginning of Mass is the Sign of the Cross. Then follows one of three "Greetings" and we are off and running in optionville. It ends (mercifully) with one of four dismissals. In between there are a myriad of pathways to get from the beginning to the end. The implication of this variation is that there are almost limitless ways to render public worship (liturgy) to God, each as good as the next, and only dependent on the preference or mood of the celebrant. Contrast this approach with the monolithic structure of the TLM, a Mass recognizable anywhere in the world at any given time. Remember also that in the Old Testament the Lord God demanded specificity of worship – what was to be sacrificed and when and how, right down to the wood ("Setim") to be used in the construction of the tabernacle (tent) of the Lord and to its specific measurements. (See Exodus chapters 25 thru 28.)

ORDINARY: THE BEGINNING

Psalm 42

1. Judge me, O God, and distinguish my cause from the nation that is not holy: deliver me from the unjust and deceitful man.
2. For thou art God my strength: why hast thou cast me off? and why do I go sorrowful whilst the enemy afflicteth me?
3. Send forth thy light and thy truth: they have conducted me, and brought me unto thy holy hill, and into thy tabernacles.
4. And I will go in to the altar of God: to God who giveth joy to my youth.
5. To thee, O God my God, I will give praise upon the harp: why art thou sad, O my soul? and why dost thou disquiet me?
6. Hope in God, for I will still give praise to him: the salvation of my countenance, and my God.

Verse 4 of the Psalm is the antiphon – “I will go unto the altar of God, to God who makes joyful my youth.” This is repeated two more times in the course of the recitation of the psalm. Jungmann¹ tells us that Psalm 42 was part of the pre-Mass procession to the altar as early as the tenth century. Verse 4 is obviously well-suited for this purpose. However, since the distance to the altar varied, in some locations it became common to say the entire Psalm at the foot of the altar. The Psalm was formally incorporated there by the Missal of St. Pius V in 1570. But, there is more justification for opening the Mass with this psalm than the aptitude of verse 4 for the approach to an altar.

Psalm 42 is considered a "psalm of David," likely written during the time of his flight from Jerusalem after his son, Absalom, had overthrown him (2 Samuel 15). If we grant this explanation, then David is experiencing a time of severe personal and political trial. His own son has betrayed him, and the Israelites have overthrown him. But David is also experiencing a trial of faith. When he flees Jerusalem, he tells Sadoc, the high priest:

“Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find grace in the sight of the Lord, he will bring me again, and he will shew me it, and his tabernacle. But if he shall say to me: Thou pleasest me not: I am ready, let him do that which is good before him.”

By his own command he has removed himself from the closest thing to God’s Presence in his world (2 Samuel 15:25-26). And, he has resigned himself to God’s will. In this context, the opening verse of the psalm is a plea for justice – “Judge me, O God, and distinguish my case from that of the unholy people. From the unjust and deceitful man deliver me.” The unholy people are the Israelites and the deceitful man is Absalom. He affirms “Thou, O God, are my strength” but then wonders “Why do you cast me off and why do I go sadly about while the enemy afflicts me?” David loves his God and has been, for the most part, an upright man, whom God has supported and rewarded. He beseeches God to recognize that his enemies are not like him in their love for the Lord and he would beg relief on that basis. He knows, or at least senses instinctively, that this should be the case, yet, in the absence of restoration, David groans in exile. He asks God to “send forth Thy light and Thy truth.” He would have God enlighten the Israelites with the same light and truth that “have led me and drawn me to Thy holy mountain and unto Thy tabernacles.” He says “I will go unto the altar of God to God who gives joy to my youth.” At the altar, he will make the customary bloody sacrifice to the Lord but he will also use his special gift and “will give praise to Thee upon the harp, O God, my God.” Worship, in the forms of sacrifice and (sung) praise, is what he comes to the holy mount to offer to the Lord. The same can be said of the Mass, our highest form of worship. So, in a straightforward way, this psalm prepares us for an event focused on worshiping God with sacrifice and praise. But the psalm does not end there. In his next breath David asks “Why art thou sad, my soul, and why dost thou trouble me?” This is followed by “Hope in God, for I will yet give praise to Him, the salvation of my countenance and my God.” This could be a question about self-doubt followed by a decision and affirmation. Or it could be a rhetorical, somewhat scolding, question to himself followed by an answer that is obvious to him. In any case, the psalm reflects a tension between the way things are and the way David believes they should be. The same God who made his youth joyful has now allowed this personal catastrophe. In the singular case of David and the Israelites, we have an archetype of Christ – the King rejected by his people. If we generalize this to the state of mankind, the psalm portrays the unenlightened, prayerful, and anticipatory state of all creation after the Fall and before Redemption.

ORDINARY: THE ENDING

The Last Gospel

1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
2. The same was in the beginning with God.
3. All things were made by him: and without him was made nothing that was made.
4. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.
5. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.
6. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.
7. This man came for a witness, to give testimony of the light, that all men might believe through him.
8. He was not the light, but was to give testimony of the light.
9. That was the true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world.
10. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.
11. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.
12. But as many as received him, he gave them power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in his name.
13. Who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
14. 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.

Now, if we again consult Jungmann, this time about the connection of the Last Gospel to the Mass, he says the first (extant) record of it at the conclusion of Mass dates from a Dominican Ordo dated 1256ⁱⁱ. But we also find the following commentary (emphasis mine):

“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.” ⁱⁱⁱ

This favorable evaluation of the Last Gospel and the admission of its connection to the “early church” are noteworthy, coming from one of the Committee that built the NOM with its emphasis on archeologism, the same Committee which nonetheless saw fit to omit this “pericope” with “the profundity of its mysteries.”

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. “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.” This is the same light that David prayed for God to “send forth”. But before the coming of the Messiah, David and his Israelites remained in “the

darkness” and did not fully comprehend the plan of salvation. 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 did not know how or when the Messiah would present Himself to the chosen people. John says, “He came unto His own, and His own 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, i.e. the Romans, not a Savior to redeem them from the “Enemy” that afflicts all men throughout time.

What form would this redemption take? 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 understood, but, He is so in a manner which David could not conceive. The Incarnation has elevated human nature from its fallen state and has made it possible for those who accept Him and believe in Him, to become heirs of the Almighty – through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ. 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 of a special bloodline. Nor did He come for those born in the carnal desire of the flesh, nor those conceived because of a determination to have offspring. He came for any of the above who “received Him”, believe in Him, and are born again “of God”. 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 looked forward in a prayerful fashion to the coming of a Messiah, the Last Gospel looks back on salvation history and describes for us just what form it has taken.

ORDINARY: BOOKENDS (Conclusion)

David’s prayer recited at the beginning of the TLM – “send forth Thy light and Thy truth” has been answered by the Incarnation, affirmed by St. John at the end of the TLM. Are these essential components to a valid Mass? No. But these bookends link the Old and New Testaments around the essential part of the 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 all men infinite grace. And second, when the Sacrament is also received, the soul of the individual believer is intimately united with its Savior.

These "bookends" have formed the setting for the TLM for centuries (several centuries before 1570, when Pius V formalized the Mass for the Latin rite in its TLM form). And they did not appear simultaneously but rather over a period of centuries. Even if the connection between the two is not immediately obvious to the world, there is no denying the connection between *emitte lucem tuam et veritatem tuam* and *in ipso vita erat, et vita erat lux hominum...plenum gratiae et veritatis*. To the argument that "Psalm 42 was not a part of the Mass for the first millennium and consequently there could not have been a *great need* for it" – I would say that no one may have perceived a great need for "bookends." Yet someone surely saw the merit of Psalm 42 to precede the Mass and another someone the desirability of recapitulating

the Mass with the Last Gospel. These two texts found their way into the Mass over time and in many locations, not because a Committee for the liturgy deliberately concocted "Eucharistic Prayers" or "Acclamations" – but because these two texts seemed to "fit." They represent "organic" growth in the form of a prologue demonstrating humanity's condition before Christ and an epilogue explaining how human nature was elevated and given a second chance by His coming. They are not results of a serious design effort by multiple committees appointed for the task. The Dominicans gave us the Last Gospel, Frankish Mass custom gave us the *Judica me*. Neither were products of Roman edict. Rather, it seems to me that *over time (that is, in His own good time) the Holy Spirit has informed the TLM with salvation history, in order to reveal more to us about the mystery of our faith*. This organic growth of centuries has been eliminated from the Ordinary of the NOM root, stem, and branch. Are we to accept that they are just accretions that needed excising by "experts" in order to bring the NOM in line with Pope Paul VI's alleged "spiritual mentality of our own times"?^{iv} Pius V codified the "old Mass" as it was being said in Rome at the time, and he did so in response to the Protestant revolution, not because he thought his was a better idea - a new form of the Mass for the about to be enlightened minds of the 16th century.

By omitting Psalm 42 and the Last Gospel from the Ordinary part of the Mass, the NOM lacks the anchorage in salvation history that they provide. Instead, there is a focus on the present that is deprived of the context of, and rationale for, that same present. To the argument that we do not need to hear the same psalm and Gospel "pericope" at every Mass, there is the aphorism – "repetition is the mother of learning." (Similarly, the reflections I have given expression to herein did not arise in my head after my first reading of these texts but only after years of rereading them and making the server responses to Psalm 42.) The person who exclusively attends the NOM hears the Last Gospel only three times – all in the Christmas season: Christmas Day, the second Sunday after Christmas, and December 31st (in year II). Psalm 42 (referred to as Psalm 43) is heard as Psalm 43: 3,4 (only 2 verses) for the 7th reading of the Easter Vigil, again as Psalm 43: 3,4 for Monday of the Third Week of Lent, and only once in its entirety as Psalm 43:1-4 for the Saturday of the Twenty-fifth Week in Ordinary Time (only in year II). Like the Last Gospel, it appears a maximum of three times – but in this case not even once on Sunday.

The organic development of centuries has been superseded by wholesale excision, on the part of a proud few, a mere five years after Vatican Council II. Wholesale excision has resulted in wholesale impoverishment. How can this happen? Does the Holy Spirit preclude "wholesale impoverishment" from the Mass or not? My answer is in the negative. Just as the Arian heresy doctrinal dispute overran the "one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church" in the fourth century, so too the "reformers" of the liturgy have thus far prevailed over sound liturgical practice. The "liturgy wars" spawned by the implementation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* continue afresh with one pope claiming parity among rites and his successor endeavoring, once again, to banish the Mass of the Ages. This attempt will fail as well.

- i J. A. Jungmann, S. J. – *The Mass of the Roman Rite* – Vol.1, p. 293
- ii *Ibid.* Vol 2, p. 448
- iii *Ibid.* Vol 2, p. 447
- iv Austin Flannery, O.P. – *Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* – p. 138