



SAINT JOHN FISHER PARISH

August 15, 2021

Dear Parishioners:

Last month Pope Francis issued a document severely restricting the use of the Latin Mass based on the Roman Missal of 1962. Allow me to explain the context of his decision.

On December 4, 1963, the Bishops of the Second Vatican Council by a vote of 2197-4 approved the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, and Pope Paul VI officially promulgated it. This document not only allowed the vernacular in the celebration of Mass and the sacraments but also called for a revision of the Roman Missal. Moreover, it said: "Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy." (n.14) This is the mantra for all changes that were to take place.

In 1969 Pope Paul VI promulgated the revised Roman Missal. The English edition came out in 1970 just a few months before I was ordained. This is the only Missal I have ever used. A new lectionary came out that added on Sundays an Old Testament reading to the Epistle and Gospel, with the readings on a 3-year cycle instead of one. The Constitution encouraged a variety of ministries in the liturgy rather than just the priest.

Among those 4 who voted against the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy was Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre of France. He opposed the liturgy so vehemently that eventually he founded the Society of Saint Pius X as a small community of seminarians in the village of Écône, Switzerland, dedicated to resisting the liturgical changes of Vatican II. In 1975 Pope Paul VI ordered him to disband the community. Lefebvre ignored the order. As he was getting older, he realized that he needed someone to succeed him. So, in 1988 without the permission of Pope John Paul II he consecrated 4 bishops. According to church law Lefebvre and the 4 bishops incurred automatic excommunication. Lefebvre died 3 years later.

Pope John Paul II tried to reconcile the Society of Saint Pius X with the church. So he gave them permission to use for Mass the Roman Missal of 1962, sometimes called the Tridentine Mass, and allowed any local bishop to approve its use in his diocese. In 2009 as a further gesture of reconciliation, Pope Benedict XVI lifted posthumously the excommunication of Archbishop Lefebvre and of the 4 bishops still alive. He extended the use of the Tridentine Mass even without the local Bishop's permission but said that the Vatican II Mass is still the ordinary form, and the Tridentine Mass is the extraordinary form.

Last year Pope Francis polled the bishops of the world to get their opinion on the use of the Tridentine Mass. So, last month he issued a *moto proprio*, *Traditiones Custodes*, effective immediately reversing the previous actions of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI. He said that the faculty given by his predecessors to promote unity in the church has created more division. His decision, in response to bishops' requests, aims to stop it from developing as a movement against Vatican II.

This does not prevent Latin, or any other language being used at Mass. We at times chant parts of the Mass here in Latin. However, the celebrant must celebrate the Mass using the Roman Missal overwhelmingly approved by the Bishops of Vatican II. This action of Pope Francis was long overdue.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Msgr. David A. Sork
Pastor