

The Tridentine (Latin) Mass Directive

On July 16, Pope Francis issued an Apostolic Letter, *Traditionis Custodes*, on the use of the pre-Vatican II Roman liturgy. He provided new guidelines and abrogated all prior directives not in conformity with them. This is a brief synopsis of the history behind this action, what concerns Pope Francis and what he hopes to achieve.

The phrase “That’s the way it always was” certainly doesn’t apply to our central liturgical action, the Mass. Over the course of centuries, the main actions of the Mass developed with a multitude of accompanying texts and rubrics. Many local churches adopted specific rites, but the Western Church has never had just one rite. (And five rites remain among the 23 Eastern Catholic Churches.) Wishing to bring greater unity to the Roman Church, and to resist the influence of Reformation churches, the Council of Trent called for uniformity, achieved when Pope Pius V issued a revised Roman Missal for the Latin Church in 1570. But he allowed rites which were at least 200 years old to continue, as they still do. The two principal ones are the Ambrosian Rite in Milan, Italy, and some neighboring communities, and the Mozarabic Rite in Toledo and Madrid, Spain.

Although Pius V decreed that nothing was to be added to, omitted from, or changed in, his Roman Missal, he himself made the first change the next year, adding the Feast of Our Lady of Victory (renamed by his successor Gregory XIII as “The Most Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary” and, by John XXIII, “Our Lady of the Rosary”). And popes continued to add or remove feasts and prayers over the centuries. “Typical” editions, the official versions for copying, were issued in 1604, 1634, 1884, and 1920. In 1955, Pius XII radically revised the liturgies for Palm Sunday and the Easter Triduum and made various changes in feasts, vigils and octaves. The final typical edition was by John XXIII in 1962. Each of these stated its basis in the Council of Trent’s directive.

The Second Vatican Council’s *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* makes clear that the liturgy demands the full, conscious, and active participation by all in the faith community. A restoration and reform of the liturgy was to be done so that all would understand and participate fully and actively as a community. Liturgical revisions were to be preceded by theological, historical and pastoral investigations. Greater use of Sacred Scripture, vernacular languages, and adaptations to local cultures were encouraged. The result was the Roman Missal issued by Paul VI in 1970, revised by him in 1975 and further revised by John Paul II in 2002. This Third Typical Edition of the Missal is in use today.

Even before the 1970 Missal was finalized, conservatives criticized its contents. Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, whose work on draft documents for Vatican II was rejected by the bishops, refused to implement Council-inspired reforms and founded the Society of St. Pius X (SSPX) to train seminarians in the Tridentine (Latin) Mass. He rejected Council teachings on liturgy and on religious liberty, as well as the Mass of Paul VI, and resisted appeals by the pope to reverse his positions.

Although Paul VI let elderly priests use the Tridentine Mass in private celebrations, he would not extend that permission. In 1984, John Paul II authorized bishops to permit limited celebration of the Tridentine Mass, in the hope of reconciling Lefebvre and his followers with Rome. He expanded the scope of that permission in 1988, just after Lefebvre had performed the schismatic action of ordaining bishops without Vatican approval. Some SSPX followers did return, forming the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter, a society to foster the Tridentine Mass. In 2007, Benedict XVI further expanded the authorization to use this liturgy to all priests, without requiring their bishops' approval. He hoped that the two forms of the Roman Rite would enrich each other and might eventually lead to a unified liturgical celebration.

Last month, Pope Francis issued new guidelines sharply restricting the celebration of the Tridentine Mass and abrogating all previous directives that do not conform to his directive. In a letter to the bishops, he expressed concern that the opportunity provided by his predecessors "intended to recover the unity of an ecclesial body with diverse liturgical sensibilities, was exploited to widen the gaps, reinforce the divergences, and encourage disagreements that injure the Church, block her path, and expose her to the peril of division." He added that use of the 1962 Roman Missal "is often characterized by a rejection not only of the liturgical reform, but of the Vatican Council II itself, claiming, with unfounded and unsustainable assertions, that it betrayed the Tradition and the 'true Church.'"

Key points in Francis' new directive include:

- Bishops, not priests, will decide when, where, and by whom the Tridentine Mass will be celebrated. Scripture readings are to be proclaimed in the vernacular.
- Parish churches are not to be used and no new personal parishes are to be erected for these Masses.
- Priests authorized for these Masses should be skilled in the use of the pre-1970 Roman Missal, know Latin sufficiently to thoroughly comprehend the rubrics and liturgical texts and "be animated by a lively pastoral charity and sense of ecclesial communion." Those ordained after July 16 need approval from Rome.
- Bishops are to determine that groups celebrating the 1962 rite do not deny the validity and legitimacy of Vatican II's liturgical reform.
- Bishops are to verify that parishes erected for such groups are effective for their spiritual growth and decide whether or not to retain them. Bishops are not to authorize new groups.

Francis expects bishops to provide for the good of those rooted in the previous form of celebration and who need to return to the current Roman Rite, which Paul VI said had the goal of raising up, in a variety of languages, "a single and identical prayer" that expressed unity. "This unity I intend to re-establish throughout the Church of the Roman Rite," Francis declared.

Three Observations

Francis' Letter opens with "Traditionis custodes" – "Guardians of the Tradition" – and he makes clear that it is the bishops in communion with the Bishop of Rome who are the authentic guardians of the Church's Sacred Tradition, not individuals who call themselves traditionalists or defenders of the "true Church."

Tradition is not the same as Traditionalism. Tradition encompasses the core beliefs of the community; Traditionalism is an attachment to a past expression of the Tradition.

One could say Tradition deals with the substance, but Traditionalism, the accidents. Or that Tradition emphasizes the core, but Traditionalism, the trappings. Or that Tradition values the wine, but Traditionalism, the bottle.

"Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. Tradition lives in conversation with the past, while remembering where we are and when we are and that it is we who have to decide. Traditionalism supposes that nothing should ever be done for the first time, so all that is needed to solve any problem is to arrive at the supposedly unanimous testimony of this homogenized tradition."

– Jaroslav Pelikan, Lutheran pastor/ acclaimed scholar, 1983 *Jefferson Lecture*

Lex orandi, Lex credendi – What we pray is what we believe

The issue is not the Latin language – the typical edition of the Roman Missal is in Latin, from which authorized translations are made; priests could use it untranslated.

Rather, the issue is the ecclesiology and liturgical practice of the Tridentine Mass -- it reflects a different "church" than what Vatican II presented:

<u>TRIDENTINE MASS</u>	<u>VATICAN II (MASS OF PAUL VI)</u>
<i>Congregation watches the priest offer the sacrifice at the altar.</i>	Community gathers at the Lord's Table, in full, conscious, and active worship .
<i>Priest says most prayers quietly, acolytes respond to Latin prompts.</i>	Community hears almost everything, in the vernacular, and responds.
<i>Priest and choir sing.</i>	Choir leads the community in song.
<i>Clerical elitism –the priest does it all; the congregation is almost irrelevant</i>	Priest leads the community in their mutual action of worship
<i>Mystery</i>	Revelation of Word & Sacrament

The four popes involved took different approaches to granting permissions for the Tridentine Mass, although each hoped for eventual unity in the Church:

Paul VI – allowed elderly priests to use it for private celebrations; wanted a single liturgical expression to unite the Western Church.

John Paul II – acting against advice he received from bishops, allowed bishops to grant limited permissions, with the hope of bringing Lefebvre and his followers back to Rome.

Benedict XVI – acting without consulting bishops, extended permission to all priests, with pastors to decide implementation in their parishes, with the hope that the two forms of the Roman Rite would enrich each other and result in one revised form.

Francis – after surveying the world's bishops, acted out of concerns from their feedback to restrict use of the Tridentine Mass and abrogated all earlier directives that do not conform with his Apostolic Letter. He declared the current liturgy to be the unique expression of the Roman Rite's *lex orandi*. Hopes to end divisive trends, affirm Vatican II, and strengthen the bishops' role as Guardians of the Tradition.