

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE TRADITIONAL LATIN MASS

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August 3/4, 2019

For the next couple weeks I plan to provide the key differences between the Extraordinary Form (Traditional Latin Mass) and the Ordinary Form (Novus Ordo) of the Mass, including the rationale for the differences.

Prayers at the Foot of the Altar

- Before the priest ascends up the steps to the altar, he and the servers pray Psalm 42, the Confiteor, the absolution, and four versicles from other psalms.
 - In Psalm 42, David says he will go into the altar of God to offer sacrifice and praise. The Messiah was promised to come from the house of David, and he prefigured Christ. Psalm 42 links the Old Testament worship to the Mass and Christ will be made present on the altar in Mass.
 - The Confiteor is said for the same reason as in the Novus Ordo, confession of guilt; and the absolution is for the venial sins of the servers and congregation.

The Priest prays almost the entire Mass facing the Altar

- Almost all of the words uttered by the priest are addressed to God, specifically the Father, while the priest offers the Mass *in persona Christi*.
 - The altar represents God and is thus, the most fitting direction towards which to physically orient ourselves when attending and offering the Mass. The priest is leading the congregation in worship of God, as well as leading our spiritual pilgrimage to Heaven; it makes sense then for the priest to face the direction we're going and to whom we're going.
 - When the priest faces the same direction as the congregation, it is a sign of unity; and as everyone is facing the high altar, it calls to mind the vertical dimension of our worship, prayers to God in Heaven.
 - The Eucharist in the tabernacle is usually on the altar, and if the priest faces the altar, he doesn't have to worry about turning his back on Christ in the Eucharist.
- When the priest addresses the people, he turns then and faces them.
 - The Ordinary Form of the Mass was actually intended by Vatican II to be said facing the altar. The current custom of facing the people was not originally foreseen.
 - With that said, the priest can offer the Ordinary Form of the Mass in the same direction as the people, facing the front of the altar. This is called, *Ad Orientem*, and is done in some parishes.

The Whole Mass is in Latin (except the homily, which begins with the readings in English)

- Latin is still the official and universal language of the Church (since before 400AD). The meaning of any word in Latin does not change over time, and allows for continuity and the unbroken handing down of tradition from one generation to the next. This fosters a greater unity for all Catholic believers, as one can attend the Latin Mass in Boston, Bavaria, or Beijing, and it will be the same regardless of what language you happen to speak.
 - Latin is also objectively easier to chant than some languages, and if you can chant the Mass parts in Latin in Wichita, you can chant those same Latin parts anywhere.