

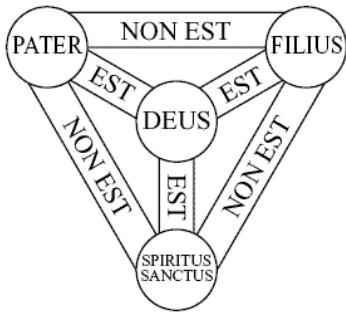
Tridentine Community News

May 20, 2007

Repetition in the Holy Mass

One of the first things that newcomers to the Tridentine Mass tend to notice is the amount of repetition in the prayers of the Mass. Why is so much repeated? What is the benefit?

Repetition is not unique to the Tridentine Mass. If you have ever attended an Eastern Rite Divine Liturgy, you will recall that “Lord, have mercy” is repeated seemingly continually throughout the service. Far from being annoying, it contextualizes the rest of the liturgy and reminds us that we are mere creatures of God. Let us examine where we find repetition in the Classical Roman Rite:



The Glória Patri: Used in the Asperges, the Prayers Before the Foot of the Altar, the Introit, and the Lavabo. In the Novus Ordo, the Glória Patri is an option that may be used when chanting the Asperges and the Propers, but in practice, it is rarely heard.

This prayer is a definitive acknowledgement of the Holy Trinity, a theological concept certainly worthy of mention in the Holy Mass. The Glória Patri should not be unfamiliar to Catholics, as it remains a part of the Holy Rosary, among countless other prayers.

The Confíteor: In the 1962 Missal, it is said twice, by the priest and by the servers/congregation. Earlier editions of the missal also had the servers recite it just prior to receiving Holy Communion. Immediately after each instance of the Confíteor, the Misereáur prayer is also recited by the party not reciting the Confíteor, as a means of beseeching mercy from God towards the party who just recited the prayer. The priest's separate Confíteor helps to distinguish his fundamentally different, sacrificial role versus everyone else assisting at Holy Mass.

The Kyrie: In the Tridentine Mass, a 3-3-3 arrangement, clearly calling to mind the Trinity. In the Novus Ordo, it is 2-2-2, seemingly more focused on the celebrant and congregation echoing one another.

Prayer conclusions: The full “Per Dóminum nostrum Jesum Christum Fílium Tuum...” and its counterparts are said at the end of every Collect, Secret, and Postcommunion. The Novus Ordo permits abbreviated conclusions such as “Per Christum Dóminum nostrum.” Far from being tedious, the full conclusions express more clearly the relationship of the members of the Holy Trinity to one another, and vary depending on the context of to whom the particular Oration is being addressed.

Signs of the Cross: Throughout the Tridentine Mass, from the Gloria, to the Credo, to the Canon, and the pre-Communion prayers, the priest makes numerous Signs of the Cross. These are for the most part eliminated in the Novus Ordo, even in Eucharistic Prayer I, the same Canon used in the Tridentine Mass.

These Signs of the Cross are both blessings of the elements to be consecrated and a constant calling to mind of the Holy Trinity.

Genuflections: The Tridentine Mass is replete with genuflections, from the incensing and Credo, through the Canon and pre-Communion sequence. In addition, the altar server rubrics prescribe genuflections whenever crossing the tabernacle or entering and exiting the sanctuary. In the 2002 edition of the Novus Ordo, all genuflections were eliminated save for one upon entering the sanctuary at the beginning of Mass, and one before exiting after Mass. All others were to be replaced with a simple bow to the tabernacle.



Theologically, the Tridentine Mass' rubrics are more instinctive: Since we Catholics believe that Christ is in the tabernacle, why be casual about crossing in front of Him? As for the priest, since he is handling the Sacred Species, does it not make sense for him to show special reverence to Christ throughout that process? Eliminating all but two genuflections during the Mass arguably sets a dangerous example of excessive informality before the Blessed Sacrament, for both priests and laity.

The “Dómine, non sum dignus” is recited three times by the priest, and three times by the servers/congregation prior to Holy Communion. In the Novus Ordo, the priest, servers, and congregation recite this prayer only once, together. Again, the threefold prayer clearly reminds us of the Holy Trinity. But in the context of this particular prayer, the repetition is a means of reminding ourselves of our humbleness before Christ in the Blessed Sacrament before the key moment of Holy Communion.

Interestingly, the Novus Ordo has retained some repetitive prayers of seemingly lesser significance. For instance, why repeat the Alleluia after its proper verse? Why repeat the refrain to the Responsorial Psalm? If so many other instances of repetition have been discarded, why retain these specific ones? As with the twofold Kyrie, they seem to have more value as tools to engage the congregation in responding, rather than to focus on specific theological concepts.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is supposed to focus our minds on the transcendent. The Tridentine Mass' inclusion of repetitive functions both helps us to concentrate on the sacred actions taking place, and helps us to develop a habit of reverence towards God that can and should carry over into other areas of our lives.