

Tridentine Community News

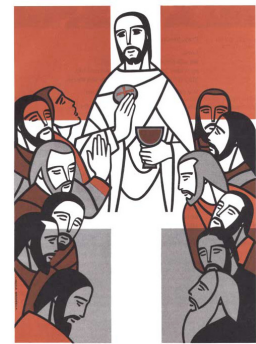
June 1, 2008

An Appeal for Tradition in Liturgical Art

A Solemn Tridentine Mass is an experience meant to involve all of the senses: Sound from the choir and organ. Touch from the sacraments and sacramentals. Smell from incense. Taste from the Holy Eucharist. And Sight from the statuary, the church interior, and the act of the Mass itself. The Church thereby uses the human senses to move the mind towards active contemplation and prayer. Logically, only the very best of artwork should be employed in this most holy endeavor.



The Vatican publishes one, and only one, official Missal for the Novus Ordo Mass: The 2002 *Missale Romanum*, or altar missal, written entirely in Latin. With a recognizable cover, this is the missal used locally at St. Joseph Church, as well as by the Holy Father at the Vatican. One would think that this missal would express the very best in Catholic art. But open its pages, and what you see is artwork such as that depicted at left.



The de facto standard English Ordinary Form altar missal used in the United States contains artwork such as that seen at left. Is this really the best that contemporary artists can offer? The look is already dated, in a Peter Max-ish way. This kind of standard is a slippery slope that can lead to carelessness in other aesthetic areas. There may be a place for such designs, but the Sacred Liturgy is deserving of more timeless and inspiring portraiture.



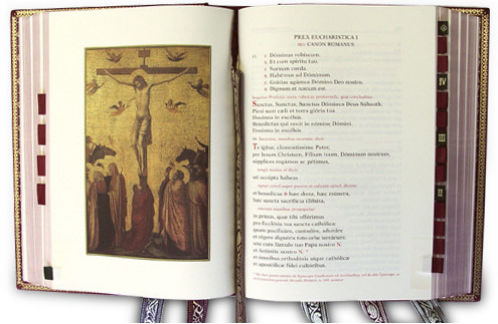
extensive use of a more traditional style of art. Most use black-and-white line art, similar to the images used in hand missals and on our weekly Latin/English Propers handouts. Some employ color images. All of this art is of the highest quality and clearly befit a book with as sacred a purpose as an altar missal serves.



TEMPUS NATIVITATIS
DIE 25 DECEMBRIS
IN NATIVITATE DOMINI

In diebus illis...
Antiphona ad Introitum
D^{ominus} dicit ad nos: *Filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te.* Ps. 137: 6. *Quare fremuerunt gentes: et populi meditati sunt inania?* Gloria Patri, Dominus.
Oratio
D^{ominus}, qui hanc sacramentorum noctem veri humani facti illustratione clarescere de, quibus sumus, ut, cuius lucis mysteria in terra cognovimus, eius quoque gloria in caelo performari: Qui tecum.
Laetitia Epistolae beati Pauli Apostoli ad Titum
C^{arissime} Apperuit gratia Dei Salvatoris nostri omnibus hominibus, exultans nos, ut abrogatione impietatum, et secretarum divitiarum, sobrietate, et iuste, et pio vivamus in hoc saeculo, expectantes beatam spem, et adventum gloriae.

Recognizing this discrepancy, the Midwest Theological Forum has published its own Latin Novus Ordo altar missal, intended to restore some of that dignity. Everything from the binding to the images to the quality of the paper used is of the highest quality. Given that the market for such a book is limited, the price is not cheap. Yet MTF is to be applauded for taking the initiative to prove that it is possible to publish an altar missal that continues the tradition of perceptibly beautiful books for such a high purpose.



Is modern artwork as likely to inspire holy and religious thoughts as the traditional art found in museums and older churches? Does a wicker basket or a gold ciborium better convey the respect due to the Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament? Does a polyester poncho chasuble with an abstract (or no) design highlight the sacrificial role of the celebrant better than a classic Roman or Gothic vestment? And what about the choice of music to accompany the Mass? What genre is more likely to convey something to believers, and inspire and attract non-believers?

To make the Sacred Liturgy more reverent, a good place to start is in the artwork employed in the official books used at the altar. The Vatican Press itself should be setting an example. A second place is with vestments that truly befit the sacred liturgy. A third is with appropriate sacred vessels. Beauty and reverence in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass are not the exclusive province of the Extraordinary Form, though many are attracted to it because of the higher likelihood that traditional art will be employed. Pope Benedict XVI's expression, a "hermeneutic of continuity", has become a catchphrase for the uniting of these elements together. It can be jarring to witness a rock Mass in a historic, unwreckovated church. It can also be odd to see an Extraordinary Form Mass celebrated in a modern church, clearly not built to accommodate the altar furnishings and altar servers' movements of the Tridentine Mass. Yet a reverently celebrated Novus Ordo Mass accompanied by traditional art and music in a classically-designed church is consistent with our liturgical heritage.

Fostering the continued development of authentically Catholic art is a sound way for the Church to remain an inspiration to mankind in the future. Some of the world's most gifted artists, craftsmen, and musicians have historically served the Church. So should it be in the future. Trendy designs end up looking dated; the Church is not a slave to fashion. Thankfully, Pope Benedict is demonstrating that traditional vestment designs, altar configurations, and music have a place in the modern Church. Traditional Catholic art helps keep the Mass recognizably Catholic. And when the Mass is Catholic, graces are sure to flow, not the least of which are vocations to the priesthood and religious life.