

Tridentine Community News

July 8, 2007

Tridentine Travelogue: Traditional Latin Masses on the Frontier

Most of us think of Tridentine Masses as existing in either historic urban churches or chapels, or smaller suburban parishes. Many people drive a long way to attend indult Masses: at St. Josaphat, people come from Ann Arbor, Brighton, and Lake Orion, while at Assumption Church folks drive from Ann Arbor and Bloomfield Township, Michigan; and Chatham and Sarnia, Ontario.

But consider the situation of our brethren in the less populated states. Some of them must drive far longer distances to reach their local indult Mass sites. And in at least two instances, attendees may need to fly in.

House of Prayer, Fairbanks, Alaska

Alaska is a vast frontier of mountains, lakes, and open spaces. Notable for fiercely cold weather and almost 24 hour night in the winter, alternating with summer's 24 hour sunlight, Alaska has an extraordinarily remote, end-of-the-inhabitable-world feel.

Anchorage, Alaska's largest city with a reasonably large downtown and actual traffic rush hours, does not have a Tridentine Mass. The only indult Mass in the entire state is in Alaska's second largest city, Fairbanks, situated towards the middle of the state. There, the Bishop of Northern Alaska has permitted a Sunday Tridentine Mass on the grounds of Sacred Heart Cathedral, though not in the Cathedral proper. Rather, the Mass is held at the St. Therese of Lisieux Chapel inside a small, mobile home-like building known as the House of Prayer. Jesuit Fr. Normand Pepin is the longtime celebrant. Befitting his avocation of composing traditional liturgical music, Fr. Pepin has recently supported the formation of a small schola to sing the Propers for the 40-50 people who attend regularly.

The Cathedral considers the Tridentine Community an integral part of the parish and includes them in significant functions, such as the annual Corpus Christi procession.



Glancing at this humble building, one could conclude that it is not a sufficiently majestic edifice for the Traditional Mass. But few of Alaska's Catholic Churches, even the older and larger ones, are as

ornate as ones we are accustomed to seeing here in the Midwest.

The population of Alaska has a higher percentage of private pilots than any other state. There are also more Ma and Pa commuter airlines than elsewhere. Citizens think nothing of jumping on a plane to go somewhere, in large part because there is no airport

security for the commuter carriers. Just show up 5 minutes before your flight and go. Pilots and regular passengers know one another; there is a casual feel to these short hops. Therefore, one could live in an outlying city and commute in to the Tridentine Mass, as it is only a five minute drive from the Fairbanks airport.

Blessed Sacrament Church, Honolulu, Hawaii

At the opposite end of the climate spectrum from Alaska is the state of Hawaii. Most every day is sunny and 80 degrees. Even the weather forecasts on the radio are brief: "This afternoon, the weather will be...partly cloudy." Temperature is rarely mentioned. But Hawaii shares two characteristics with Alaska: A relatively small, scattered population, and only one indult Mass, in the most populated city of Honolulu, on the island of Oahu.

As with Alaska, if you live on (or are fortunate enough to be visiting) one of the other islands and want to attend the Traditional Mass, you must hop on a commuter airline to get to Honolulu. But say your prayers: Hawaiian commuter airplanes sometimes have only one pilot.

Situated in a larger city, the Honolulu Mass is well attended. It has moved around, from St. James Mission, to St. Anthony, and now to Blessed Sacrament Church. With its



whitewashed interior, small altar, and plain, modern sanctuary, Blessed Sacrament is not an appropriate site for the Tridentine Mass. St. James Mission was a nicer site; too bad it had to move.

But as this column has repeatedly stated, the Tridentine Mass scene is a people story; buildings are secondary. A friendly relationship with the host pastor is far more important to the



health of an indult community than a nice church edifice. Perhaps it was the "people" side of this equation that dictated the move.

The next time that a Sunday traffic snarl on the way to Mass has you gnashing your teeth, consider that your commute is still shorter and simpler than those you might have to endure were you to live in one of these remote locales.

Questions? Comments? Ideas for a future column? Please e-mail tridnews@stjosaphatchurch.org with your thoughts.