

Tridentine Community News

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Liturgical Law, Canon Law, and Custom – Part 2 of 3

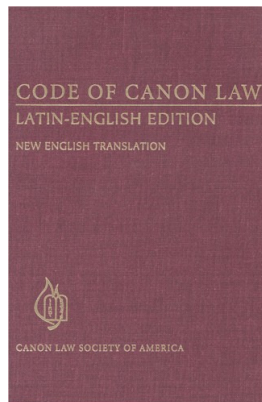
Liturgical Law Source #6: Papal Decisions

The highest human authority in the Church on earth is, of course, the Holy Father. He may issue decisions affecting the Mass on his own authority (the actual meaning of the term *Motu Proprio*). His granting of freedom for priests to celebrate the Tridentine Mass in the recent *Motu Proprio Summórum Pontíficum* is, of course, an excellent example of such a decision.

Papal legislation on the Mass may also come via less grandiose means. For instance, Pope Benedict XVI's new wording for the Good Friday Prayer for the Jews in the Tridentine Missal was announced in *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican newspaper.

Canon Law

Certain things that we take for granted in the Tridentine Mass are actually not matters of Liturgical Law at all, but rather of Canon Law and its sister universal rulings pertaining to the Latin Rite Church. For instance, the rules regarding fasting (one hour before Holy Communion [Canon 919 in the 1983 Code]) and abstinence (Ash Wednesday and the Fridays of Lent [Canon 1251]) pertain to those who follow the Extraordinary Form as well.



Older edition hand missals may make mention of previous fasting laws (originally since midnight; as of 1957, three hours before Holy Communion), but those are not matters of Liturgical Law.

While some of these changes might seem excessively unrestrictive, they do provide some benefit to present-day concerns. For example, those who attend an afternoon Tridentine Mass would surely be inconvenienced by having to have fasted since midnight. Nevertheless, one who chooses to follow the former guidelines is following a laudatory pious custom.

Two areas of fairly serious concern have arisen because of universal Church Law: Permission for Holy Communion to be given in the hand, and permission for female altar servers are indults in North America. Virtually no one who has sought out the Traditional Mass would desire either of these options. Yet in a strict sense, they are permissible. And thus we come to the next section:

Local Custom

The Church permits there to be certain local variations and traditions in the celebration of Holy Mass. Distribution of Holy Communion on the tongue and the use of strictly male altar servers are examples of universal traditions in the Extraordinary

Form that typically predominate over what Canon Law allows. Indeed, the custom of male-only servers is even an allowable tradition in the Ordinary Form: The pastor of a parish has the right to impose such a restriction.

Custom also comes into play in other areas. Some actions are not central to the Mass, and unless specifically prohibited by Rome, are tolerated. For instance, some of the times in Mass when bells are rung are open to local custom. In the ubiquitous Red Missals, notice that bells are specified at the Offertory and during the people's *Dómine, non sum dignus*. Those are actually Chicago-area customs recalled by the author of those booklets. Similarly, some churches ring the bell just before Holy Communion. While not specified in the Rubrics, and therefore not often witnessed, these instances of bell ringing are indeed permissible.

The use of a Crucifix in entrance and exit processions, and the use of gloves with which to handle the Crucifix are other examples of matters of custom. It might surprise you to know that a Crucifix is only required in Pontifical Masses.

Abuses of Custom

Not every local variation is permitted. For instance, there are differences in how incensations are performed in the Tridentine vs. Novus Ordo Mass. Lay servers receive three single swings of the thurible in the Ordinary Form Mass, but only one swing in the Extraordinary Form. Thurifers who apply Novus Ordo rubrics to Tridentine Masses are not invoking local custom, but are rather in violation of the Rubrics.

It is easy to say, "Well, we do it because St. So-and-so Church does it that way." But that is not a legitimate justification for those actions. St. So-and-so, no matter how famous they might be, may be in error. One must only refer to official documents of the Church in determining how the Mass is to be celebrated.

The Law is the Law, Useful or Not

Virtually everyone applauded the P.C.E.D.'s decision to allow laymen who had been Instituted as an Acolyte to serve as Subdeacon in a Solemn High Mass. Such a "straw" Subdeacon may not wear a maniple, because he is not admitted to the clerical state. By making this allowance, the P.C.E.D. has made available Solemn High Masses in more places than would host them if the Subdeacon had to be only a Deacon or Priest. No one is forced to take advantage of this ruling, yet it does benefit many groups.

On the other hand, virtually no one nowadays thinks that the 1958 papal decision to permit (but not require) the congregation to join in singing the *Pater Noster* with the priest was a good idea. It is not the norm, and indeed in one local Tridentine Community, actually caused a significant amount of controversy when a celebrant wanted to impose it.

It is always safest to stick with the norm. Our Mass should and does follow the 1962 Missal, just as our Holy Father wishes.