

Tridentine Community News

November 29, 2009

Clarity in Blessings: A Comparison of the Extraordinary and Ordinary Forms of the Roman Ritual – Part 2 of 3

Our third comparison is the Blessing of Sacred Vessels or Ornaments In General (from the Extraordinary Form's *Rituále Románium* book) alongside the Blessing of Articles for Liturgical Use (from the Ordinary Form's Book of Blessings):

Extraordinary Form

✠. Our help is in the name of the Lord.

✠. Who made heaven and earth.

✠. The Lord be with you.

✠. And with your spirit.

Let us pray.

Most gracious Father and Lord, hear our prayers, and bless ✠ and sanctify ✠ these vessels and ornaments of the altar prepared for the sacred ministry of Thy Church. Through Christ our Lord.

✠. Amen.

Let us pray.

Almighty and eternal God, by Whom all things defiled are purified, and in Whom all things purified retain their lustre, humbly we ask Thy Omnipotence that the vessels and ornaments which Thy servants offer unto Thee, be freed from the contaminating influence of evil spirits, and that by Thy blessing ✠ they remain sanctified for divine worship. Through Christ our Lord.

✠. Amen.

[They are then sprinkled with Holy Water.]

Ordinary Form

✠. Our help is in the name of the Lord.

✠. Who made heaven and earth.

[A short passage of sacred Scripture is read.]

✠. Let us pray. Blessed are you, O God, who through your Son, the Mediator of the New Testament, graciously accept our praise and generously bestow your gifts on us. Grant that these articles, set aside for the celebration of divine worship, may be signs of our reverence for you and helps to our faithful service. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

✠. Amen.

The latter seems rather diluted compared to the former. Extraordinary Form blessings always include at least one sign of the Cross, plus a sprinkling of the object with (exorcized) Holy Water. These actions, along with the wording of many of the blessings, purify the object being blessed. That notion of sanctification is deemphasized in the Ordinary Form versions.

The Book of Blessings rarely capitalizes pronouns referring to a member of the Holy Trinity. It virtually never employs the hierarchical pronouns Thee and Thou. By so doing, there is less distinction of the Divine Nature. It is the liturgical equivalent of middle school students addressing their teachers by their first

names. Such texts are arguably a causative factor in the lessening of reverence towards the sacred, much less the Divine.

Sacred Scripture readings have a prominent role in the Book of Blessings. Largely because of their incorporation, many of the blessings have longer forms than their counterparts in the traditional Ritual. An argument might be made that major blessings should not be rushed affairs. A counter-argument is that the traditional *Rituále* is more practical for pastoral reasons: With today's rushed schedules, blessings such as a priest might be asked to give after Mass should be shorter, to accommodate more people and more objects. In this respect, the Book of Blessings is showing its age: it was composed during a more leisurely paced era. Nowadays, blessings that are too lengthy are likely never to be used, or to be replaced with spontaneously-worded blessings that might not express the mind of the Church. Yet the Ritual exists in the first place so that specific formulas are followed.

Organic Growth of the Roman Ritual

Debates over the relative merits of the Extraordinary and Ordinary Forms of Holy Mass are regular topics in the Catholic press. In contrast, little time has been spent thus far comparing the official blessings of the Church found in the Roman Ritual and its derivative books. The classic *Rituále Románium* provides greater clarity in its blessings than its counterpart Book of Blessings. Objects are clearly blessed in every case; the person(s) using them are not the primary objects of (sometimes quasi-) blessing.

This is not to say that the 1961 Ritual cannot be improved. It needs additional prayers for objects that did not exist in 1961, for example blessings of computers. It could stand to drop or update some of the obsolete blessings, such as the Blessing of a Telegraph Instrument. However, the rather conspicuously inconsistent form of the new Good Friday Prayer for the Jews is a lesson that additions should be made in conformity with existing blessings: The new Good Friday prayer, unlike all of the other Good Friday intercessions, concludes with the short "*Per Christum Dóminum nostrum*", rather than the full "*Per Dóminum nostrum Jesum Christum Fílium tuum, qui tecum vivit et regnat...*" format of phrase which finishes each of the other Good Friday prayers. In contrast, new Extraordinary Form blessings should be carefully patterned on the old, whose language and structure has been developed and refined over centuries.

If it is actually the intention of the Church that the Ordinary Form no longer blesses objects but rather blesses those who use the objects, then the blessings should be given more accurate titles, such as: "Blessing of Those Who Use Holy Water", if only for linguistic accuracy. This is a separate matter from the debate over whether the prayers are appropriately worded.

Our Holy Father's 2007 Motu Proprio, *Summórum Pontíficum* gives every priest the right to use the classic Roman Ritual for all of the blessings and Sacraments. There is reason to be optimistic that the increasing use of the traditional books will lead to a recognition of the need for a revised, more accurately phrased Book of Blessings, regardless of one's liturgical proclivities.