

Tridentine Community News

December 24, 2006

Rubrics and Common Sense

As Advent closes and the Christmas season begins, it is worth mentioning a topic of charity that should guide our appreciation for the Tridentine Mass.

Recent columns have addressed the appeal of the precision of the rubrics, or rules for celebration, of the Traditional Latin Mass. The Church gives us these guidelines to ensure consistent, reverent worship, and to reduce the amount of controversy over particular actions or omissions during the Mass.

As Dr. Alcuin Reid so effectively warns in his Introduction to the latest edition of the master rubric reference book, Fortescue's "The Ceremonies of the Roman Rite Described", we must be careful not to get "too serious about rubrics." That spirit can turn away priests (and others) from being interested in the Tridentine Mass. In this era, we want to encourage priests to learn the Classical Roman Rite. To develop a love for its riches, priests must not be intimidated as they learn it. It is complex, far more so than the Novus Ordo. Furthermore, many priests have virtually no exposure to, or understanding of, Latin, making the liturgy unpronounceable and incomprehensible, as well as complicated. We need to be charitable with priests as they become familiar with this venerable rite.

We must not get so caught up in the rubrics as to lose sight of common sense. Altar servers and celebrants will forget things. Priests and servers new to the Tridentine rite will need direction during Mass. Elderly priests may not be very mobile or able to genuflect. Vestment sets may not be complete (maniples are especially rare today). Certain priests may have aversions to wearing a biretta or traditional-style vestments. We must also recognize and be tolerant of those variations in the Mass which are permitted in accordance with local custom, for example how entrance and exit processions are arranged and how bells are rung.

While we should always strive for perfection in sacred worship, we should also recognize that real-world concerns will affect just how precisely a given Mass may be executed. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is not a military operation; it is the work of imperfect and sinful human beings, giving God worship which He does not need, but which we need to give to Him. Those in the sanctuary should not move as robots, but should also not slither around casually as one might do in one's own living room.

This is not to say that we should condone repeated, intentional liturgical abuses. But we must be realistic. Focus on the primary objective: Reverent worship of Almighty God. Our motivations for seeking out the Tridentine Mass derive partially from desiring

its sheer beauty and articulateness of expression of our Holy Catholic Faith, but also from a desire to escape the needless and often destructive improvisations that detract from the reverence of many Novus Ordo Masses. Minor quirks or errors of a particular celebrant in the Tridentine rite almost never affect the validity of the Mass, our paramount concern. Virtually every indult Tridentine community throughout the world shares this same thinking and does the best they can with the resources they happen to have.

Therefore, as we continue to explore the Mass and its detailed rubrics in future columns, let us do so with a spirit of appreciation for its conveyance of the sacred. Let us not be distracted by seeking out mistakes in this or that particular celebration, any

more than we should permit driver errors on the freeways to drive us crazy. We have a destination in mind, the salvation of our souls. As long as we do our best to follow the rules and avoid unnecessary distractions, our Lord will surely understand the occasional imperfections in our liturgies.

Multiple Masses of Christmas

Christmas is one of very few feasts in the liturgical year that has several Masses for the day. More specifically, the Propers, including the Epistle and Gospel, differ among the various Masses.

The Tridentine custom does not allow for an anticipated Sunday Mass on the preceding Saturday evening. Instead, certain important feasts have specific Vigil Masses for the preceding days. December 24 is officially the Vigil of the Nativity of Our Lord. According to the Tridentine *Ordo*, or Calendar, in 2006, the Vigil Mass of Christmas displaces the Fourth Sunday of Advent, even for Masses

during the day.

The Vigil Mass is distinct from the Midnight Mass on December 25. That Mass is officially the First Mass of Christmas Day.

The Second Mass of Christmas Day is the Mass At Dawn. Rarely celebrated because of its precise definition of needing to occur at sunrise, it is an acknowledgement of the birth of our Lord being a spiritual sunrise for mankind.

The Third Mass of Christmas Day is the Mass During the Day. This is the Mass most commonly celebrated, and in fact will be the one we will use at St. Josaphat and St. Michael Churches. Because the Gospel used at this Mass is the text of the usual Last Gospel, there is no Last Gospel at this Mass. Occasionally other Masses have Proper, or unique, Last Gospels, but Holy Mother Church has determined that the opening of the Gospel of St. John is so relevant to Christmas Day, that it must stand alone as the only Gospel of that Mass.

