

212. PAUL VI, Address to a general audience, on the new *Ordo Missae*, 26 November 1969: Not 5 (1969) 412–416 (Italian).

Again we wish to invite you to direct your thoughts to the liturgical innovations in the new rite of Mass that will come into use in our celebration of the holy sacrifice next Sunday, 30 November, the First Sunday of Advent. A new rite of Mass means a change in a revered, centuries-old tradition. Hence it involves our religious heritage, a patrimony that had a right to an untouchable permanence, to put on our lips the prayer of our forefathers and saints, and to give us the assurance of fidelity to our spiritual past, which we make present so as to pass it on to the generations yet to come. Under the present circumstances we understand better the value of historical tradition and the communion of saints. The change affects the carrying out of the ceremonies of the Mass. We shall notice, perhaps with some uneasiness, that the rites at the altar are not proceeding with those words and gestures we had become so used to as to take them for granted. The change also affects the faithful. It should interest all those who are present, distracting them from their familiar personal devotions or usual lethargy.

We shall have to prepare for this many-sided upheaval, which, of course, is typical of any kind of newness introduced into our accustomed way of doing things. We might note that devout people are the ones who will be most disturbed; having their own laudable way of attending Mass, they will feel themselves torn away from their usual thoughts and obliged to replace them with others. Even priests themselves may find the experience troubling.

³ See M. de la Taille, *Mysterium Fidei*, Elucid. 9.

⁴ See Bouyer.

What should we do when we are faced with such an extraordinary and historic event? First of all, we must prepare ourselves. The innovation is no small matter. We must not let ourselves be taken by surprise by the appearance, or perhaps even the annoyance, of the external forms of the new rite. Intelligent people and an alert faithful have a responsibility to become informed about the new measures we speak of. Thanks to the many excellent measures taken in churches and in publications this is not difficult to do.

As noted on another occasion, we would do well to realize the reasons behind the introduction of this serious change.^a The first reason is obedience to the Council, which then becomes obedience to the bishops, who interpret and carry out its prescriptions. This first reason is not a mere canonical matter, that is, one involving only external precept; it is connected with the charism of the liturgical life, that is, with the power and effectiveness of ecclesial prayer. This prayer finds its most authoritative expression in the bishop and, therefore, in priests, who assist him in his ministry and who, like him, act *in persona Christi*.¹ The will of Christ and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit summon the Church to this change. We should recognize the prophetic phase transpiring in the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. It is stirring the Church, awakening it, and obliging it to revitalize the mysterious art of its prayer. The purpose of this movement in the Church is also, as we have already said,^b the second reason for the reform. That purpose is to unite the assembly of the faithful as closely and effectively as possible to the official rite of the liturgy of the word and of the eucharist, which make up the Mass. For the faithful too are "a royal priesthood," that is, endowed with the power for supernatural communion with God.

Clearly the most noticeable new departure is that of language. From now on the vernacular, not Latin, will be the principal language of the Mass. For those who appreciate the beauty of Latin, its power, and aptness to express the sacred, substitution of the vernacular certainly represents a great sacrifice. We are losing the idiom of the Christian ages; we become like profane intruders into the literary sanctuary of sacred language; we shall lose a large portion of that wonderful and incomparable, artistic and spiritual reality, Gregorian chant. We indeed have reason for sadness and perhaps even for bewilderment. What shall we put in the place of this angelic language? We are sacrificing a priceless treasure. For what reason? What is worth more than these sublime values of the Church? The answer may seem trite and prosaic, but it is sound because it is both human and apostolic. Our understanding of prayer is worth more than the previous, ancient garments in which it has been regally clad. Of more value, too, is the participation of the people, of modern people who are surrounded by clear, intelligible language, translatable into their ordinary conversation. If our sacred Latin should, like a thick curtain, close us off from the world of children and young people, of work and the business of everyday, then would we, fishers of men, be wise to allow it exclusive dominion over the speech of religion and prayer?

What does St. Paul tell us? "In the church, I would rather speak five words of my own understanding so that by my voice I may also instruct others, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue."² And St. Augustine seems to add his own

^a See DOL 211 no. 1758.

¹ See Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Eph.* IV.

^b See DOL 211 no. 1758.

² 1 Cor. 14:19.

comment when he says: "Provided all are instructed, there need be no fear of who the teachers are."³ Moreover, the new Mass rite lays down the provision that the faithful "should know how to sing at least some parts of the Ordinary of the Mass in Latin, especially the profession of faith and the Lord's Prayer."⁴ But let us remember well, as both an admonition and a consolation; that Latin will certainly not disappear in our Church. It will remain the noble language of the Apostolic See's official pronouncements, the academic vehicle for ecclesiastical studies, and the key that unlocks for us the heritage of our religious, historical, and literary culture, and, if possible, it will have a new and resplendent awakening.

Finally, close examination will reveal that the fundamental plan of the Mass in its theological and spiritual import remains what it always has been. As a matter of fact, if the rite is carried out as it should be, that spiritual import will stand out in even greater richness. This will be so because of the greater simplicity of the ceremonies, the variety and number of biblical texts, the coordinated actions of the various ministers, the set moments of silence interspersed at the different stages of the rite, and above all because of the two indispensable requisites — the intimate participation of each individual present and the outpouring of hearts in a mutual charity. These two last requirements should make the Mass, more than ever before, a school of deep spirituality and a serene but exacting training for Christian social living. The soul's relationship with Christ and with other people acquires a new and vital intensity. Through the Church's minister, Christ the priest and victim renews and offers his redemptive sacrifice. He does so in the rite symbolizing his last supper, which left to us his body and blood under the appearances of bread and wine for our personal and spiritual nourishment and for our fusion into the unity of his redemptive love and immortal life.

A practical difficulty remains, however, which is quite important because of the special nature of the sacred rite. How are we to celebrate this new rite when we do not yet have a complete missal and when so many uncertainties still surround the way it is to be carried out? To answer these questions, it will help to read you some of the following directives that come to us from the competent office, the Congregation for Divine Worship.

"As far as the obligatory aspects of the new rite are concerned:

1. *"Regarding the Latin text:* Priests who celebrate Mass in Latin, in private, or even in public for those cases provided for in the law, can use either the Roman Missal or the new rite until 28 November 1971.

"If they use the Roman Missal, they may use the three new anaphoras and the Roman Canon, with the options provided for in the latest text (omission of some saints, of the conclusions, etc.). The readings and the prayer of the faithful may be in the vernacular.

"If they use the new rite, they are to follow the official text, with the aforementioned permissions for use of the vernacular.

2. *"Regarding the vernacular text:* In Italy, effective 30 November this year, all those who celebrate Mass with a congregation are to use the Order of Mass published by the Italian conference of bishops or by another national conference.

"The readings for Sundays and holydays will be taken: either from the lectionary published by the Centro Azione Liturgica; or from the Roman Missal for Sundays and holydays that has been used up to now.

³ Augustine, *Serm.* 37: PL 38, 228; see also *Serm.* 299: PL 38, 1371.

⁴ GIRM no. 19 [DOL 208 no. 1409].

“On weekdays, they shall continue to use the weekday lectionary published three years ago.

“There is no problem for those who celebrate Mass in private because they *must celebrate Mass in Latin*. If, by virtue of a particular indult, they celebrate Mass in the vernacular: for the texts, they are to follow what has already been said concerning Mass with a congregation; for the rite, however, they are to follow the special *Ordo* published by the Italian conference of bishops.”

Let us in every case and always remember that “the Mass is a mystery, in which we live through a death prompted by love. Its divine reality surpasses words. . . . It is the act without equal, the very act of our redemption in the memorial that makes it present.”⁵