

Pastor's Pen: Mass

In 1963, the Second Vatican Council, in its document *Sancrosanctum Concilium* (The Constitution of the Liturgy) called for an updating of the Mass of The Roman Rite. It called for greater active participation from the lay faithful and for greater use (though not exclusive) of the vernacular (local) language. 6 years later, St Paul VI instituted the Mass of Paul VI and the first books to be used in that liturgy were used in Advent of 1970. Since that time, this Mass, also known as the Novus Ordo (New Order) or as called by Benedict XVI, the ordinary form of the Mass, has been the norm in the Latin Rite Churches (that's us). Since 1970, it has undergone several revisions, the latest being in 2010. Each version of the rite is covered in the beginning of the Roman Missal (the book I use on the altar which contains all the prayers connected with Mass) with what is called a 'General Instruction.' You have heard me call it by its proper name, "The General Instruction of the Roman Missal" (henceforth the GIRM) many times. The GIRM covers all of the rules and guidelines regarding the execution of the Mass of Paul VI.

Many Rites, One Church Over the centuries multiple rites of the Mass have been approved for use by those in union with the Pope. You have the eastern rites (Byzantine, Maronite, Melkite for example), some western rites (Ambrosian, Ziarian to name a few) and the two recognized rituals for those who are called Roman Catholic: the Mass of Paul VI (ordinary form) and the Mass of Pius V (extraordinary form. Also known as the Latin Mass). The Mass of Paul VI is the norm for the Catholic Church. It is what we do here. It is what I do.

Over the years, for various reasons, priests and laity have taken great liberties with the GIRM of the Mass of Paul VI, and many things were introduced that were never sanctioned by the Church in any way. What this has led to is a number of abuses in the liturgy that stem from sources and theologies contrary to what the Church has asked. Some of these abuses were more mild in nature and merely made the Mass illicit (unlawful) and some of the abuses invalidated the Mass (that means the sacramental nature of the Mass was severed).

What this led to are what I call the endless liturgy wars. What felt good or was liked by more secular sources supplanted what the Church always asked for in the GIRM. I do not think the majority of this was done out of malice, but out of a poor understanding of the Mass. We are coming out of decades of poor catechesis. I do not fault the people in the pews. When John Paul II and more to the point Benedict XVI revived the use of the Mass of Pius V, it was an answer to those despondent over the grave abuses taking place at Mass. These popes cautioned that the Mass of Paul VI was still the norm and that the abuses needed to be chased out. This has been a monumental task. People grew fond of things allowed in and couldn't see why they needed to be eliminated. Pope Francis and Pope Leo XIV have both said the abuses present in how many did the Mass of Paul VI needed to be eliminated. That is where we are now.

Over the past several years, I have tried to follow these teachings of our popes. Our former two bishops also addressed the abuses and encouraged the elimination of them. It has been a slow go. Priests backed away at the slightest hint of pushback or were not wanting to do it themselves. That is them, this is me. I feel the obligation based on the vows I made on my

ordination to be loyal to the teachings of the Church. This is why I spend much time teaching, am careful with my preaching, and have worked with others to bring how Mass is done in our parishes. We will do what the GIRM tells us to do. The rite and the Mass do belong to a particular congregation, but to the Church as a whole. No priest or congregation has the right to alter the rite.

As of late, this has meant subtle changes to music. This conversation began at the request of Bishop McKnight as many songs were filled with bad and destructive theology that misrepresented the Catholic faith (or ignored it) or came from songwriters who had been credibly accused of sexual abuse. When we started these conversations here, I wanted to do more than just talk about songs. To do that would turn into taste wars (I like Latin..I like praise and worship) that are largely unwinnable. I gave out copies of the GIRM and the US Bishops' letter on Music at Mass so that we might understand not just what the Church envisioned but what was the purpose of music at Mass. From that vantage point we moved.

The upshot is that the Church never envisioned the elimination of chant, rather it says that preference is to be given to chant. There are two reasons for this: 1) chant is a music form religious in nature (it arose out of a religious tradition as opposed to be copied from secular sources) and 2) the Book of Psalms from the Old Testament is the original 'hymnal' of the Bible and of both Jewish worship and Christian worship for many centuries. The GIRM did not call for the elimination of hymns, but that hymns did not supplant chant. The latter happened. So, we are instituting the balance the GIRM has always envisioned. This is not saying that one is by nature superior to the other (although there were some hymns that were awful..not all of them) but that the GIRM sees them coexisting.

This has led to the restoration of the Opening Antiphon and its psalmody and the Communion Antiphon and its psalmody. The format is exactly as the responsorial psalm. The cantor sings the antiphon once, we repeat, then the cantor sings the stanzas (verses if you will) and we sing the antiphon again. Hymns can still be used at other times of the Mass. I have been accused of wanting to take us backward. Not true. I am wanting to do what we have always been asked to do but haven't.

Music was the last thing I tackled. It is a hot spot to be sure. This isn't a matter of going backward. I frequently need to remind people the Church didn't begin or end at the close of Vatican II in 1965. As a pastor, I want to move beyond the tribalism that often polarizes worship and puts me in the perpetual cycle of choosing winners and losers. We are just going to do what the GIRM says and be done with it. Why? Our arguing and fretting about how Mass is done and the music wars distracts us from our mission: the salvation of souls! It is not about doing what I like or you like, but in humble obedience, doing what we have been rightfully asked.