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The Franciscan Legionnaire

Newsletter of the Friars Legion of St. Peter's Church in the Loop
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MASS MOVEMENT

This is a big deal. Over the past few years we have received several bundles of changes in the mass, all of which were quite minor, a bit of liturgical tweaking here and there. Pope Benedict's action of 7 July 2007, however, by which he granted a much broader freedom of use for the old mass is a big deal, a major development whose effects, over time, will be experienced by all Catholics and not just those who will seek out and participate in the masses celebrated according to the old ritual.

On 7 July the pope released two documents. The first and more formal of the two is an apostolic letter, issued *motu proprio* (i.e. on his own initiative and not in response to a specific question or request) and addressed to the whole Church. It bears the title *Summorum Pontificum* and contains the new legislation regarding the use of the pre-Vatican II missal. It is not long, only four pages, and an English translation is available at www.zenit.org. The other document is a cover letter to the first, and is addressed to the bishops of the world. In this second letter the pope states the reasons for the new rules, and addresses two specific objections to them that have been raised over the past year. The two letters are very much a matched set, and we really cannot appreciate the importance of the new law contained in the first without understanding the rationale that is given in the second.

We will look at both, but first a word about terms. The descriptive phrases used here – old mass, new mass – are not those used by the pope, and with good reason. As he insists in the cover letter, there are not two masses or two

Roman rites, but only one, which can be celebrated in two different ways. Having said that, we still need a convenient way of referring to the two different forms of the mass. The pope's careful and precise expressions are a bit bulky for our purposes, and other turns of phrase available and in use – Tridentine and Paul VI, Latin and English, turned away from the people and facing the people – are more misleading than helpful. "Old mass, new mass" is obviously imperfect, but perhaps that very obviousness will work to limit the misunderstanding.

Summorum Pontificum begins with a summary of how different popes have worked to ensure that the Church's liturgy offers God a worship worthy of his Divine Majesty. Vatican II had "expressed a desire that the respectful reverence due to divine worship should be renewed and adapted to the needs of our time," and so in 1970 Pope Paul VI approved new liturgical books for the Roman Rite. Although these "were willingly accepted by bishops, priests and faithful," in some regions of the world large numbers of Catholics continued to prefer the earlier liturgical forms, whose use had been forbidden in 1970. In 1984 Pope John Paul II allowed bishops to grant permissions to laity and priests to use the old mass. In 1988 he urged the bishops to be more generous in allowing the use of the old mass where and when it was requested by the people. In the nearly two decades since then, there was much discussion and consultation. Many people who would like access to the old mass still do not have it. Benedict's new rules are a response to that need.

Every priest in good standing and having the necessary knowledge of Latin and the old rubrics is now able to celebrate the old mass as well as the new; the priest no longer must apply to the bishop and receive from him a special permission to say the old mass. This applies to private masses and public celebrations. The new mass remains the “ordinary expression” of the Church’s law of prayer, and the old mass is an “extraordinary expression” of that law. “They are, in fact, two usages of the one Roman rite.”

How often the old mass will actually be celebrated depends on a number of things, including the wishes of the people. Under this new law, if “a stable group of faithful who adhere to the earlier liturgical tradition” wants the old mass, their pastor should willingly agree to their request and offer it. If the pastor fails to honor the request, the parishioners should inform the bishop, and he is strongly urged to satisfy their wishes. And if the bishop cannot arrange for the celebration of the old mass for them, the matter is to be referred to Rome, to a special commission that has the task of implementing this decree.

In all this, the bishop remains the moderator of liturgy in his diocese and the guarantor of good order. So we can expect that each diocese will issue its own policy and guidelines to govern the implementation of *Summorum Pontificum*. For instance, just because a group of parishioners in a parish asks for it, that doesn’t mean that they will get an old mass in their own parish. The law suggests that bishops might provide for those requesting the old mass by establishing one or more “personal parishes” in the diocese (parishes where the old mass will be offered and which could be joined by anyone living anywhere in the diocese), or by assigning one or more priests to act as chaplains of those who have requested the old mass.

The new law allows the old mass to be celebrated on weekdays; as for Sunday masses, only one of them could be said using the old rite. And finally, although *Summorum Pontificum* is

mainly concerned with the Eucharist, there are also provisions regarding the celebration of the other sacraments, the breviary, and the internal prayer life and masses of religious congregations. All of this new law will go into effect on 14 September 2007.

To understand why Benedict took this step and what he hopes it will accomplish, we turn now to the cover letter that was issued with the *motu proprio* and addressed to the bishops. This papal action was long anticipated. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger had made it quite clear that he thought that the banning of the old mass after Vatican II was a serious mistake and an unnecessary move. Never in the history of the Church had such a thing been done, he pointed out, and the old mass should have been allowed to those who wished to remain with it. When he was elected pope in April 2005, it was expected that he would move rapidly to permit a wider use of the old mass. The surprise, therefore, was not that this was done, but that it took so long to get it done. Clearly the pope wanted to take his time and consult with his brother bishops. In the course of these prolonged discussions, two main objections emerged, which Benedict deals with in his cover letter: first, this action detracts from the authority of Vatican II by questioning one of that Council’s central acts, the call for liturgical reform; and second, a wider use of the old mass will lead to confusion and divisions within the local parish communities.

In response to the first objection, Benedict categorically denies that his action calls into question the authority of the Council, although he acknowledges that this fear was behind the refusal of many bishops to follow the lead of John Paul II and be generous in granting permissions for the use of the old mass. The new mass remains the ordinary form, by virtue of the law and the reality that a relatively small number of parishes will have the resources or the inclination to celebrate the old mass. This action is not



a capitulation to those who deny the authority or legitimacy of Vatican II. It is, rather, a pastoral response to those who accept the binding character of the Council and remain faithful to the pope and the bishops, but who desire to recover the form of the sacred liturgy that was so dear to them. What gave rise to this desire and why has it remained so strong? The pope's answer deserves to be quoted in full:

This occurred above all because in many places celebrations were not faithful to the prescriptions of the new Missal, but the latter actually was understood as authorizing or even requiring creativity, which frequently led to deformations of the liturgy which were hard to bear. I am speaking from experience, since I too lived through that period with all its hopes and its confusion. And I have seen how arbitrary deformations of the liturgy caused deep pain to individuals totally rooted in the faith of the Church.

This is a stinging rebuke to the priests who treated the new mass as if they owned it and could do with it whatever they liked, and to the bishops who tolerated and thus enabled this sacramental abuse. The pope's use of the words *many places* and *frequently* indicates that he is keenly aware that this problem was not isolated or only rarely encountered, but was quite widespread. He had made the same point often in his earlier writings. Many people have been alienated by this, and not just old people. One of the more surprising recent developments is the attraction to the old mass felt by younger persons, including seminarians. These are Catholics, members of the Church: giving them the back of the hand was never an acceptable pastoral response, nor is extending a hand to them in allowing the wider use of the old mass the functional equivalent of trashing Vatican II.

It is in his response to the second objection, however, that Benedict shows what he is really aiming at and hoping for by taking this step. It is not that he wants to see the celebration of more old masses, although there certainly could be more such under the new rules. What he wants to see is a change in the way all masses are celebrated, old and new, but especially the new, since it will remain the ordinary form of the

Roman Rite, the form most of us will continue to use. He maintains that "the two Forms of the usage of the Roman Rite can be mutually enriching." The existence of the two forms, side by side, even in the same parish, will not produce confusion, but will lead to each influencing the other in ways that will be beneficial to both.

On the old mass side, *Summorum Pontificum* now allows the readings to be read in the vernacular, and it also seems to allow for the use of the new lectionary in the old mass. It does not require either, but it clears the way for both. Also, in the cover letter the pope says that it would be good if the texts for the feasts of newly canonized saints and the texts of some of the new prefaces could be inserted into the old missal. These are possible changes to the old mass, taken from the new, which he believes would enrich and enhance the old mass.

On the new mass side, the pope is not looking for specific changes or adjustments, but for something deeper, namely a more powerful demonstration than what we have had up to now of "the sacrality which attracts many people to the former usage." A frequently heard complaint about the new mass is that, compared with the old, it is less able to communicate a sense of the sacred. Benedict is convinced that the problem here is not with the new missal, which possesses "spiritual richness" and "theological depth," but with the way it has been treated and used by too many priests. The remedy for this lies in the new mass's "being celebrated with great reverence in harmony with the liturgical directives." Although the pope does not say here precisely why he thinks that the freer use of the old mass will contribute to the acquisition of the new liturgical consciousness needed by those who use the new mass, in earlier works he had stressed the importance of liturgical education, and especially the liturgical education of future priests. In the new situation created by the pope's action, the old mass will have to be taught in the seminaries, and priests already ordained are far more likely than they were before to be motivated to familiarize themselves with the texts and rubrics of the old mass. In doing

so, they will encounter a liturgical attitude and outlook quite different from the one that most of them were taught. The Latin language and the old rubrics “locked in” the words and actions of the priest at mass, and so made it abundantly, crushingly clear that he is the servant and not the master of the mysteries he celebrates. This did not guarantee that all masses celebrated before 1970 were done with dignity and the sense of the sacred that Benedict wants to see enhanced by his new rules. Those of us old enough to have been alive then no doubt have some memories of sloppy priests and slipshod celebrations. Still, the old mass was clearly less prone to the “arbitrary deformations of the liturgy” referred to in the letter, and the pope is convinced that the greater freedom to use the old mass will work to good effect in the way that the new mass is celebrated in most places.

By increasing the freedom to use the old mass and encouraging the mutual influence of new and old that will enrich both, Pope Benedict is moving to instill a deeper sense of the gift

and power of the mass in all the faithful.

In the mid-7th century, Saint Maximus the Confessor wrote:

I urge every single Christian to visit the holy church of God often and never to miss the holy liturgy performed in it, both because of the holy angels who are in attendance and always take notice of those who come, bringing them to God’s attention and interceding for them, and because of the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is always present in an invisible way but is most especially so during the time of the holy liturgy. This grace enfolds all those who attend, creates them anew, and truly leads each of them, according to his own capacities, to a more divine way of living; it brings each one closer to what the sacred mysteries signify, even when the individual does not experience this consciously.

To assist the Church to reach that awareness and to live that truth is the goal of *Summorum Pontificum* and of all liturgical renewal.

—Fr. Bob Sprott, O.F.M.

APPLICATION FOR YEAR-LONG MEMORIAL CANDLE

(Please print, leaving a space between each word.)

To be lit in honor of: _____
 Living_____ Deceased_____

Requested by: _____

Date candle is to be lit: Immediately_____ Specific Date_____

The offering for the Memorial Candle is \$150.00. Please enclose a check for the full amount with this form.

APPLICATION FOR PERPETUAL ENROLLMENT IN THE FRIARS LEGION

(Please print, leaving a space between each word.)

Please Enroll: _____
 as a Perpetual Member of the Saint Peter’s Friars Legion.
 Living_____ Deceased_____

Your Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip Code: _____

OFFERING: Individual, \$25.00_____ Family, \$100.00_____ *(Immediate family, parents and children)*