

Traditionalist Catholics were shocked but in many cases not surprised when Pope Francis recently restricted the use of the Latin Mass¹ with his *motu proprio Traditionis custodes*. News of the new guidance had previously leaked to the public. While affirming the validity of the Latin Mass it severely curtailed its use. This drew a sharp response from a small minority of Roman Catholics who were using the previous Missal of Pope John XXIII. The vast majority of Roman Catholics didn't appear to me to really care one way or the other or at best made a glancing notice. Granted, I come to this conclusion through only anecdotal information, but I do believe it to be a fairly accurate appraisal of the situation facing the Roman Catholic Church at the present time.

Followers of this website and readers of my publications will understand I don't have a horse in this race. I come from the Byzantine Catholic tradition, so the Pope's pronouncement has virtually no impact on other Eastern Catholics or me. I truly come to this discussion from an outsider's perspective. The following are my thoughts on this issue for what they are worth.

First, we have to recognize the Byzantine Rites of the Catholic Church² and of the various branches of Orthodoxy³ are still very much the minority in the Christian world.⁴ Clergy I know have stated an appreciation for the Byzantine Divine Liturgy is an "acquired taste". For those not familiar with it, the various forms of the Byzantine Liturgy are fully the equivalent of the old Latin High Mass. It is full of deep theological prayers, incense, chanting, bells and mystery. One Byzantine priest I know stated the Divine Liturgy is so full of Biblical quotes it is the closest thing to Divine Inspiration we have seen since the books of the Bible. In the Byzantine tradition, the laity is the guardian of the Divine Liturgy so changes in it are slow and organic. The following is a debatable point, but sudden shifts in the Liturgy such as occurred in the Roman Mass after Vatican II and recently with Popes Benedict and Francis are really not seen.⁵ I suppose it is hard to improve on John

¹ Technically we are speaking about the Tridentine Mass or the Roman Missal of Pope John XXIII issued in 1962. This was the last officially promulgated Mass to be celebrated in Latin.

² There are thirteen when this article was written. The largest of the Byzantine Catholic Churches is the Ukrainian Catholic Church. For the sake of completeness, there are other Eastern Catholic Churches following the Antiochian, Alexandrian, Chaldean and Armenian rites.

³ Orthodox ecclesiology generally follows the above breakdown with some notable exceptions. For example, there is no Orthodox counterpart to the Maronite Catholic Church.

⁴ For example all branches of Orthodoxy comprise about 12% of all Christians. Catholicism comprises about 50% of the world's Christians with Eastern Catholics comprising about 2% of all Catholics. See <https://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/>. Accessed Aug 7, 2021

⁵ Pope Benedict liberalized the use of the Latin Mass in 2007 with his *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum*. Among its provisions was that any priest did not need the approval of his bishop to celebrate with this Rite. In essence, Pope Francis reversed this decision believing the Tridentine Mass had become a source of division in the Church. Some skeptics have claimed this whole controversy really revolves around the authority of the local bishop to regulate the celebration of the Mass within his diocese.

Chrysostom, Basil the Great, and Gregory the Dialogist (known in the West as Pope Gregory the Great).

There is no question many disaffected Traditionalist Roman Catholics have joined the Byzantine Church looking for such majestic worship since they could not find priests celebrating the Latin Mass. For example, one prominent politician attending my ordination ceremony stated, "...this is the first time in a long time I KNOW I have attended a valid Mass." Another Roman Catholic Traditionalist visited our parish and said to the pastor, "What a beautiful and traditional liturgy! The only problem is that it is not in Latin!" With a gleam in his eye, the priest said, "You mean the Latin that Jesus spoke?" The potential parishioner said, "Yes, Yes, that Latin!".

Aside from the one person just mentioned, the use of Latin was not a particular sticking point for most of the Traditionalists as they joined the Byzantine Church. It was the rite--the form of the Mass--that was most important to them. The *Novus Ordo* Mass of Pope Paul VI did not satisfy their spiritual needs, but the Byzantine Liturgy did--even though the Divine Liturgy was being celebrated in the vernacular. Perhaps more research is needed on why and if this is so. The Byzantine Liturgy has a long tradition of using the vernacular language. In the United States this caused its own problems as the "vernacular" language was often the language of the "Old Country"--Slovak, Ukrainian, Hungarian, etc. Eventually, their use fell away and English became the predominant liturgical language in the United States. Yes, some Slavonic and other languages are still being used, but only in specific instances. Nevertheless, the Byzantine Liturgy still draws some of the Traditionalists.

I have always thought of the Catholic Church as a "big tent". It could accommodate many rituals and traditions. As I stated previously, the Byzantine Divine Liturgy (and the liturgies of other Eastern Christian Churches) will always be a minority Sunday Worship service. Sadly, very few people are knocking down the doors to come to a Byzantine Divine Liturgy. All you have to do is look at Sunday attendance, even before the Pandemic hit to see that was. The Vatican tolerates the Byzantine Divine Liturgy alongside the current Mass. It just seems sad to me it could not find a home for the Latin Mass in its Big Tent.

If you disagree with this assessment, please let me know. I am very much interested in all things liturgical!