



Office of the Bishop

August 2, 2021

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

One of the great gifts of the Second Vatican Council to the Church in our day is the reform of the liturgy. It is because of this reform that the Mass now invites us all to participate more actively in the celebration of the Eucharist as a sign of the priesthood of all believers. And the fact that we celebrate Mass in English or in Spanish, Vietnamese, Italian or Polish in the richly diverse parishes of our diocese is also a reflection of the changes made by the Second Vatican Council. The reform of the Council increased the role of the Scriptures at Mass and recovered many liturgical elements from the early life of the Church that had enriched the Catholic celebration of the Mass before the Council of Trent.

Thus the Roman liturgical texts promulgated by Saint Paul VI and Saint John Paul II as a consequence of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council have continually constituted a rich, authentic and authoritative reflection of the Church's prayer in the Latin Rite.

Unfortunately, in the wake of the Council some bishops, priests and lay faithful challenged the authenticity and legitimacy of the Mass approved by Saint Paul VI in 1970. This led to a very painful conflict, with some of these Catholics who denied the legality of the new Missal effectively leaving the Church.

Saint John Paul II sought to bridge this gap and call back those who had left the Church by allowing limited use of the pre-Conciliar Roman Missal of 1962. Pope Benedict expanded this use both out of a desire to promote reconciliation and from a reverence for the pre-Conciliar liturgy itself.

But it has become clear that the expansion of the use of the 1962 Roman Missal has not led to the reconciliation that Saint John Paul and Pope Benedict had sought. Instead while the celebration of the pre-Conciliar Mass constitutes for many who seek it merely the expression of a spiritual appreciation for the beauty and reverence of the 1962 texts, for many others it has generated a culture that undermines the legitimacy of the liturgical texts that emerged from the Second Vatican Council, and more generally undermines the Council itself.

It is for this reason that Pope Francis, after consulting with the bishops of the world on this question, has imposed limitations on the celebration of the preconciliar Mass. In doing so, Pope Francis is adhering to the historic principle in the Church of lex orandi, lex credendi: the Church's unity in prayer reflects its unity in belief.

The Pope said that the liturgical texts promulgated by Saint Paul VI and Pope John Paul II after the Second Vatican Council constitute the unique expression of the lex orandi for Latin Rite Catholics. For this very reason, it is important to regularize a series of limitations on the celebration of the Eucharist using the 1962 Missal.

Pope Francis directed that the local bishop is to oversee the question of when the Roman Missal of 1962 may be used within a diocese. The Pope stated that the pre-Conciliar Mass cannot be celebrated in parish churches with the exception of personal parishes already specifically erected to provide for it. (This echoes the desire of Saint John Paul II that the Missal of 1962 should not become enmeshed in parish life.) The bishop is to determine if any priests in the diocese should be given the ability to celebrate the Mass of 1962, and whether that permission will be for public celebration or private celebration. The bishop is also to take steps to assure that the communities and clergy participating in the celebration of the pre-Conciliar Mass are not rooted in a stance of denial about the legitimacy of the Mass that emerged from the Council or a stance rooted in opposition to the Council itself.

In summary, Pope Francis has asked the bishops of the world to authorize and oversee only very limited celebrations using the Roman Missal of 1962 in their dioceses in order to ensure that these celebrations do not occupy a mainstream role in the liturgical life of the diocese or signify a coequal status for the pre-Conciliar Mass.

At the same time, the Pope stresses, the bishop should show deep pastoral solicitude for those men and women who have been part of communities that presently celebrate the Mass using the Missal of 1962.

Since Pope Francis' decree was issued, I have engaged in a process of consultation to discern how to address the celebration of the Eucharist using the 1962 Missal in the diocese of San Diego. At present, such Masses are celebrated regularly on Sundays in three places: 1) the Church of Saint Anne in San Diego, which is designated specifically for the celebration of the pre-Conciliar liturgy; 2) Saint Margaret Church in Oceanside where one Mass using the 1962 Missal is celebrated each Sunday; and 3) Saint Mary Church in Escondido, which also celebrates one Mass each Sunday.

I have consulted with the pastor and met with lay leadership from each of these communities. I have also consulted with the Deans of four diocese.

I want to emphasize that in each of the conversations with the priestly and lay leadership from Saint Anne, Saint Margaret and Saint Mary, the participants embraced fully the legitimacy of the Second Vatican Council and the Mass of Paul VI and John Paul II.

As a consequence of these discussions, I have concluded that Saint Anne will remain a personal parish entrusted to the Fraternity of Saint Peter that will provide in its church Masses celebrated according to the 1962 Missal.

Because Saint Margaret and Saint Mary are territorial parish churches, the Mass using pre-conciliar texts cannot continue there under the terms of the motu proprio issued by Pope Francis. At the same time, I recognize that most of the faithful presently attending these two celebrations live in the northern half of San Diego County and are remote from Saint Anne Church. For this reason I have initiated a process in collaboration with the men and women of Saint Mary and Saint Margaret who have been attending weekly Mass according to the 1962 Missal to identify a single non-parochial setting for the future celebration of one weekly Mass in the North.

There will be no other public celebrations of the Eucharist utilizing the Roman Missal of 1962 permitted in the diocese of San Diego. Priests who wish to celebrate the Mass using the 1962 text privately are to seek specific permission from me to do so.

I recognize that this is an issue that touches hearts deeply, for it is a love for the Eucharist that animates feelings on all sides of these question. But I hope that these steps will faithfully point to both the unique centrality of the Roman Missal promulgated by Saint John Paul II for the prayer of our local church, while also tending to the pastoral care of those who have loved the pre-Conciliar liturgy.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Robert W. McElroy  
Bishop of San Diego