

THE MASS AS THE BEGINNING OF HEAVEN ON EARTH – PART II

A BRIEF HISTORY LEADING UP TO THE REFORMS OF THE VATICAN II COUNCIL

- I. In the early Church, there were certain common elements, but due to the persecutions and difficulty in transportation and communication, there was also a great deal of variety.
- A. The fact that the Eucharist was celebrated early is clear from the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, in which he makes it clear that he taught them about the Eucharist during his first missionary journey to them, about 42-44 A.D.
 - B. Dr. Scott Hahn argues in *The Lamb's Supper* that the phrases we use at Mass are also in the Book of Revelation. He argues that, given the fact that the Book of Revelation can best be understood as a liturgy (in fact that it takes place on a Sunday) indicates that these phrases were already in place before that book was written. Likewise, then Cardinal Ratzinger argues in *The Spirit of the Liturgy* that Pauline theology emphasized that the heavenly Temple is opened on earth through the liturgy and that that focus was the main point of Christian liturgy from an early time. See *The Spirit of the Liturgy* 49-50; see 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22; Heb. 8:1-2, 9:23.
 - C. There is likewise plain evidence from home churches and from such sacred sites as the tombs of the martyrs (e.g., in the catacombs) of altars upon which Mass would have been celebrated.
 - D. There is some early evidence of how the Mass was celebrated, which gives the essential aspects of the Mass to this day.
 - 1. In explaining the overall faith to the Emperor about the year 155, St. Justin the Martyr also described what Christians do at the Sunday celebration, now called the Mass. The elements he listed are: (1) readings from the writings of the apostles and prophets (now called the Old and New Testaments); (2) a talk (now called the homily) by the presider (now called the priest) challenging and admonishing the people; (3) prayers for others,

now called the prayers of the faithful; (4) the sign of peace, which is now just before Communion; (5) the offering of bread and wine and water; (6) the prayer of praise and glory of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and giving thanks (now called the Eucharistic Prayer, from eucharistein, the Greek word for thanksgiving); (7) the great Amen; and (8) the distribution of Communion. See Apologia 1:65-67; Catechism 1345.

2. Likewise, an early Christian document, an early Christian leader called St. Hippolytus wrote around 215 a text called The Apostolic Traditions, with a Eucharistic Prayer that bears a lot of resemblance to one of the four main options that we use today at the Mass. He clearly had a preface to the prayer that begins, as our preface does with the dialogue between the priest and the congregation.

II. When Christianity was legalized in 312-313, many more liturgical books were published and the different traditions of east and west began arising.

- A. At that time, different customs were arising out of different areas of the Church. In particular, there were five central sees in the Church: Rome, Constantinople (the capital of the Eastern Roman empire), Antioch in Syria, Alexandria in Egypt, and Jerusalem. From the later four sees developed what we call the Eastern Rites of the Catholic Church, as well as the Orthodox Churches. Rome led what would become known as the Latin or Western or Roman Rite of the Church, which now includes most of the Catholic Church.
- B. The Latin rite would largely develop from Rome and the area around it, but the missionaries to some further regions, such as Spain, Portugal and Ireland would develop some of their own customs. And, while records are not clear, as missionaries went off to barbarian lands, it does seem that the Mass was adapted in certain respects.

- C. Records indicate that, by the middle of the fourth century, and probably well before then, many of the main parts of the Mass were in place, including the opening prayer, readings from Scripture, the homily, the offertory, the Eucharistic Prayer (including almost all of the first option for the Eucharistic Prayer now), Communion, and the prayer after Communion.
- D. St. Benedict (480-547), along with his sister St. Scholastica, founded the Benedictine order, which would be the backbone of early medieval culture, as well as the main order in the West until the late eleventh century. The Benedictines would emphasize a slow careful liturgy, especially of the Liturgy of the Hours (prayers that clergy and consecrated religious are vowed to pray to this day), but also in the Mass. Overall, the Roman style tended to emphasize simplicity, care, and subtleness in meditative fashion.
- E. Pope St. Gregory I, who reigned from 590-606 and would become known as Gregory the Great, launched a massive reform of the liturgy to make the liturgy more standardized and reverent. Thus, for example, he developed what would be called Gregorian chant to increase the prayerfulness of music during the Mass.
- F. As the Western Roman Empire vanished and its influence declined, the Mass took on various styles in the different nations that were forming in Europe. There was centrally the simpler, sober Roman rite, as well as the more emotional Gallic (French) rite, the more earthy Gothic rite in what is now Germany. Unfortunately, due to the lack of education and books, there was a great deal of irregularity and sloppiness in the liturgy. Edmund Bishop wrote in his famous book Liturgical Historia (1918), the state of things at the accession of Charles the Great (769) may be summed up in two words: liturgical anarchy."

III. As the Middle Ages progressed, there were times of renewal and time of decline, sometimes with both mixed together.

A. Charlemagne (reigned 769-814) took a great interest in liturgical reform as a part of his drive for ecclesial and social reform.

1. He tried to promote the education of clergy and of the people generally, insisting for example on tests for ordination.

2. In order to unite his people, who were from very different areas (the Germanic, Frankish and Lombardian peoples), he made Latin more clearly the universal language, both of society and of liturgy. From this time on, Latin became the general language of the Mass.

3. He promoted the use of more standard liturgical books and tended to prefer the more solemn Roman rite, although he did not make any one rite universal.

4. Overall, with his collection of scholars in Aachen and his court generally, there was a liturgical renewal, not only in his realms, but throughout Europe.

B. However, with the faltering of the Carolingian renaissance in the later ninth and early tenth centuries, liturgies once again became more haphazard and less well prepared.

C. The Holy Roman Emperors Otto I, II and III (912-1002) began exerting more authority over the clergy and making the liturgy more precise again. As the eleventh century dawned more monarchs were taking an interest in the liturgy and standardizing it according to their national customs. At first the Popes favored this change because, with the difficulties

in communication and transportation, they had found it difficult to take charge of individual dioceses, especially those far away.

- D. However, starting in the eleventh century, the Popes began taking more personal charge of the bishops and the liturgy, especially with the renewals sponsored by Pope Gregory VII (1073-85). In addition, the Benedictines began a great renewal, especially with the leadership of the monastery at Cluny. This effort led to greater renewal, but also clashes with the monarchs and nobles as the issue arose of who controlled the liturgy.

- E. In the high middle ages (about 1000-1300) the great wealth and learning led to magnificent churches and cathedrals, and especially the flourishing of Gothic architecture. The clergy became more educated and liturgies generally more precise, but there was some tendency to ostentation and focus on who presented the most elaborate church, vestments, or music. There was great pageantry and an emphasis on hierarchy in the liturgy.
 - In reaction against this tendency, some religious orders, such as the Cistercian and Franciscan orders, tried to make their liturgies more simple. Pope Innocent III (1198-1206), arguably the most powerful Pope of the Middle Ages, supported this simplification. He and his successors desired also a much more precise, standard liturgies
 - There were national characters of the liturgy, such as English, French, German, Spanish, in addition to the central Roman style.

- F. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, many crises such as the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453), the Black Death, the displacement of the papacy in Avignon (1305-77), followed by the Great Schism (1378-1417) diverted attention from the liturgy and learning generally. There was still great piety as public preaching and devotions continued to flourish. But there was also a lot of superstition in the public and laxness in the spiritual life. For example, in some areas there was an obsession about relics and some very erroneous preaching on the power of indulgences.
 - In reaction to these abuses and excesses, such movements as devotion moderna sprung up, along with the popularity

of such books as The Imitation of Christ, The Cloud of Unknowing and Piers Plowman, which emphasized more an inner renewal

IV. In response to the Protestant Reformation, the Council of Trent promoted a liturgical reform that would make the Roman liturgy standard in the Latin rite.

- A. Some abuses regarding the veneration of saints and uses of indulgences were largely started the Protestant Reformation. However, the attempts at change spread to the wholesale rejection of the notion of the Mass, the priesthood, veneration of saints, and the like. The early Protestants (but not Church of England) tended to focus on a simpler liturgy, simpler churches, and less or no hierarchy.

- B. In response to the legitimate concerns raised, but determined to defend the true faith, the Council of Trent (1545-1463) set forth 15 decrees and related canons to clarify the faith and organize and reform practices across the board.

- C. In 1551, the Council issues the Decree and Canons on the Eucharist, which emphasized as a matter of infallible dogma the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist under the appearance of bread and wine, and the fact that Christ is fully present under either species, as long as that species (bread or wine) continues. The canons also upheld the rightfulness of the reservation of the Eucharist in the tabernacle and Eucharistic adoration and processions.

- D. In 1562, the Council issued the Decree and Canons on the Mass, which both upheld the ancient doctrines and practices, but also made some accommodations to the demands for a more accessible Mass.
 - 1. Thus, the Council strongly upheld the Mass as the true representation of the sacrifice of Christ and of great assistance to the faithful, both living and dead. It also upheld the rightfulness of Masses offered for the dead and in honor of the saints. Likewise, it upheld the use of such things as incense, fine vestments, and some prayers prayed in low voice by the priest to emphasize the mystery of the Mass.

2. The Council considered, but decided against, allowing the Mass to be celebrated in the vernacular. The reason was that, in the midst of so much change and rebellion against the unity of the Church, the Council decided that there was need for the universal language to be maintained in the Mass. However, in Chapter VII of the Decree, the Council did recommend that the priest or another official make more efforts during and after the Mass to explain the liturgy.
 3. The Council did recognize that "many things have already crept into [the Mass] which are alien to the great dignity of the sacrifice." To restore that dignity, the Council issued such rules as: forbidding the demand of offerings for the celebration of the Mass (although freewill offerings could be accepted); forbidding the superstitious near worship of relics and the like; forbidding "wandering" or scandalous priests to celebrate the Mass; prohibiting secular or even worse scandalous music in churches; and encouraging people attending their own parish church for Masses. The Council also authorized the standardization of the liturgy.
 4. The Council also called for the establishment of seminaries, which would train all future priests so that they would know the faith and be able to celebrate the Mass and other liturgies properly. Up to that time, most priests were simply trained in an apprentice-like system by other priests, who may or may not have given proper instruction.
- E. Shortly after the Council, the Popes, and especially St. Pope Pius V (1566-72), implemented its decrees, including a standardization of the Mass and other liturgies.
1. In Quo Primum Tempore (1570), St. Pope Pius V made the Roman rite, later called the Tridentine rite the standard for all diocesan churches in the Latin rite, although religious orders could keep their own form of the liturgy. This rite, described in the Missale Romanum, would prevail until the Vatican II Council with relatively few

changes.

2. This rite strongly emphasized the unity of the Church and the permanence of the Mass. The Tridentine Mass also reduced the number and variety of saints being celebrated, but continued their honor in the Mass and on the calendar (usually several a day.) In this way and several others, there was also a focus on the Mass pointing the way to heaven.
3. There was not much emphasis on the participation of the people or on preaching. It was thought that the people could be more prayerful if they did not have as much to say. And preaching usually occurred more outside of Mass when the emphasis was not as much on mystery and sacrifice.

VI. Between the Council of Trent and the Vatican II Council, there were also a number of other movements leading up to the later reforms.

A. At about the same time as the Council of Trent, the Baroque period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries emphasized a notion of glory and splendor at Mass, with polyphony music, very elaborate vestments, fine artwork and architecture, and the like. On the one hand, this emphasis did draw greater enthusiasm. On the other hand, there was a tendency for the pomp and ceremony to obscure the importance of worship and conversion.

B. The monarchs and nobles of Europe, whose power was rising once again, began to get very interested in the liturgy again. On the one hand, they supported the building of churches, the composition of music, schools and missionary activities. On the other hand, they tended to get too involved in controlling the liturgy, with such things as insisting on places of great prominence and giving the clergy sermons to preach.

- C. In the so-called Enlightenment era of the eighteenth century, there was more of an effort at simplification.
1. For example, in Germany, while the Mass continued in Latin, more popular German songs were introduced.
 2. In Tuscany in 1786, Bishop Scipione De' Ricci and Prince Leopold called the synod of Pistoia to call for reforms. Liturgically, it called for such things as vernacular in the Mass and only one altar in each church to focus everyone's attention on the Mass. Unfortunately, the synod also made several heretical pronouncements, as well as some ridiculous proposals, such as the elimination of perpetual religious vows. As a result, the entire effort, including some legitimate liturgical ideas, became discredited.
 3. In addition, the missionaries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries tried to accommodate local customs. Some accommodations, such as more local vestments and longer preaching were allowed. Other accommodations, such as using rice bread, were forbidden.
- D. In the nineteenth century, there was a great rise in devotions, and especially Marian devotions (including the appearance at Lourdes and the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception.) In addition, the Benedictines, especially Solemnes, France, and Beuron and Maria Laach, Germany, promoted a more reverent, ancient liturgy that would reflect the timelessness of the Church in the midst of a changing world. There was also a great effort to explain the liturgy to the people more, especially as literacy was increasing
- E. As the twentieth century dawned, there was a great deal of interest in a liturgical renewal that would get the people more involved.
1. Dom Lambert Beauduin (1873-1960) of the Benedictine monastery in Mont Cesar in Belgium, emphasized the active participation of the faithful at Mass, especially in his 1914 book *Liturgy in the Life of the Church*

2. Dom Odo Casel (1886-1948), abbot of the Benedictine monastery at Maria Laach in Germany emphasized the fact that the Mass is a timeless mystery that brings about a current transformation. The people thus must respect the unity and mystery of the Mass, but also actively make it their own.

3. In 1918, Fr. Romano Guardini (1885-1968) , a priest of the diocese of Mainz, Germany wrote The Spirit of the Liturgy, in which he emphasized the delightfulness of liturgy, emphasizing that, like all of the most joyful things, it is not meant to be "practical," but rather enriching of the spirit.

F. The Popes authorized and encouraged a renewal of participation in the Mass and understanding of it.

1. Thus, in 1903, Pope St. Pius X issued the moto proprio Tre Le Sollecitudini, he focused on Church music and encouraged the active participation of the faithful, especially in that context. In 1905, he encouraged frequent communion in the decree Sacra Tridentina Synodus. And in 1910, he published Quam Singulari, which lowered the age of First Communion to 7. In that year he also allowed the "dialogue Mass," which involved more participation by the faithful.

2. In Mediator Dei (1947), Pope Pius XII focused on liturgical renewal and the active participation of the faithful. In that encyclical, he also insisted on a more reverent form of the Mass, avoiding either an aura of rountineness or experimentation not specifically authorized by the Church. In the 1950s, he restored the Easter Vigil to her previous prominence and reduced the Eucharistic fast to three hours to allow more frequent reception of Communion, as well as lessen the burdens on priests.

G. Thus, when Pope John XIII called for the Vatican II Council, he appointed one of the commissions to work on the liturgy. That effort would eventually lead to the first Vatican II Council document, Sacrosanctum Concilium, which promoted the reform of the liturgy, but in a way that would respect its ancient traditions.