

**EXTRAORDINARY FORM of the MASS**

The Holy Father has issued an important document in the form of a *Motu Proprio* (“on his own initiative”) regarding the celebration of the Mass. Specifically, it gives permission, under certain conditions, for priests to celebrate Mass according to the Missal of Blessed Pope John XXIII. The Pope is not speaking merely about a language, since there is no question about Latin already being allowed for the celebration of the Mass. Rather, it is a blanket permission for priests to be able to celebrate Mass in one of two different ways under certain conditions.

It is obvious that the Holy Father does not wish that this special permission be divisive in the liturgical life of the Church. He reaffirms the legitimacy of the Second Vatican Council and refers to a twofold use of the one rite for the celebration of Mass. Celebrating Mass in accord with the Missal published by Pope Paul VI following the Second Vatican Council continues to be the ordinary form of celebrating the Eucharist.

On reading the document, one can see that certain clarifications will need to be made before its effective date of September 14. I plan to issue brief guidelines in this regard, based on the reminder by the Holy Father that the bishop continues to be the moderator of the liturgy in his own diocese.

It is clear that any priest of the Latin Rite may celebrate Mass in the extraordinary form when celebrating privately and without a congregation being present. Individual members of the Faithful may join him, however, provided that liturgical laws are observed. It is also clear that it is the pastor who makes the decision as to whether or not the extraordinary form is used for the whole parish. His decision is to be in response to a specific request on the part of the Faithful within the parish of which he is the pastor. In other words, a parish priest does not celebrate a regularly scheduled Mass using the extraordinary form as a result of his own preference.

Less clear is the identification of the group that may make the request for a parish Mass in Latin to be celebrated in accord with the Missal of Blessed Pope John XXIII. The Holy Father speaks of such a group as being one that has had an attachment to the former form of Mass and has consistently existed in a particular parish. In other words, it is not to be merely a novelty. How large does such a group need to be? The document does not say. Certainly, one or two individuals may not impose a change upon the whole parish.

While Pope Benedict XVI is most generous in his *Motu Proprio* to the Faithful who continue to be attached to the former way of celebrating Mass, he admits that such celebrations will not be widespread. To quote him, “The use of the old Missal presupposes a certain degree of liturgical formation and some knowledge of the Latin language, neither of these is found very often.” Pastors are encouraged to be sympathetic to those of their congregation who request the Mass in the extraordinary form. Nevertheless, they are not obligated to learn another set of liturgical rules for the celebration of Mass.

Since the Holy Father’s *Motu Proprio* does not take effect until September 14 of this year, no changes are to be made before that date. By that time, I plan to have ready some brief guidelines. It is my intention to assist our pastors in reaching out to those who have been consistently attached to the older form of Mass, while maintaining a unity within our diocesan liturgical life.