

The Mass of the Council of Trent

We think of 1500 as the approximate end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the modern age. In 1450 Gutenberg invented the first printing press with moveable type, producing a complete (Latin) Bible in 1455. Columbus discovered the Americas in 1492. In 1510 the Portuguese made a permanent settlement in Goa (India) and in 1513 they reached China. Martin Luther became critical of his own Catholic Church and was excommunicated in 1520, married in 1525 and in 1526 began organizing his own church. In France John Calvin led a breakaway Protestant church from the 1530's. In 1534 Henry VIII made himself Supreme Head of the Church of England and was excommunicated. In response to all these changes the Council of Trent met between 1545 and 1563 in twenty five sessions under three Popes. Its purpose was to criticize Protestant error and define the essentials of the Catholic Faith; it included a decision to reform the Eucharist.

Implementing the Council's decision, Pope Pius V promulgated, in the Apostolic Constitution *Quo Primum* on 14 July 1570, an edition of the Roman Missal that was obligatory for use throughout the Western Church except where there was a traditional liturgical rite of at least two centuries' antiquity (e.g. Milan). This could only be printed by authorized printers and any addition, subtraction or change was forbidden. Vatican officials were given one month to put it into use; those on the Italian side of the Alps had three months; those on the north of the Alps six months. The Pope stated "If someone dares to change anything, let him know that he incurs immediate excommunication". Pius could have produced a completely new Missal; he could have produced a historical Missal, using the best prayers from over the centuries; instead, to save time, he chose an existing rite and made a few alterations: the *Missal according to the observance of the Roman Curia* of 1474. The 1570 Missal cut many feasts of local saints and recent additions to the Gloria. It added an elevation of the cup as well as of the host; a ritual for communion of the faithful (based on the communion of the sick but with two absolutions); and a dismissal (illogically before the final blessing). Conveniently the readings were included, but the selection was poor: e.g. the same readings for every weekday of Advent. Even so it was popular:

1. Everything was in one book.
2. Individual dioceses did not have the expense of editing their own Missal.
3. Catholics had a sense of being united to the Pope in the face of Protestantism.

400 years of the Tridentine Mass

The next Pope, Sixtus V, created a special department of the Curia, the Congregation of Rites and Ceremonies, “to see to it that the sacred rites are exactly observed in all places and by all persons, in the churches of Rome and of the universe”. In other words, local dioceses lost all liberty to make changes. Eventually, if anyone had the slightest doubt about how to do something in the Mass they would consult Rome (rubricism). For example:

“When the deacon presents something, for example the paten or the chalice, to the celebrant, clothed in his vestments, he first kisses the object, then the hand of the celebrant; and when he receives something from him, he first kisses the hand and then the object... When he has incense blessed, he receives the incense boat first with his right hand and, transferring it to his left hand, with his right hand he presents to the celebrant the spoon, which he kisses at the end the celebrant will take, and then kisses the celebrant’s hand”.

The use of Latin was absolute: up until 1898 it was prohibited to translate the prayers of the Mass into modern languages. People had prayer books which they read during Mass, but the books did not include the Mass prayers. They also said the rosary. It was as if the Mass, which they could barely hear and which few could understand, was just something going on in the background. Only the altar server made the responses. If they went to communion it was usually after an early Low Mass. There would be a High Mass later in the day but this could be like a concert, hiding the structure of the Mass rather than accompanying it. The people - and even the priest, deacon and subdeacon - would sit down for long parts like the Gloria or Creed.

During this time great scholars discovered the ancient liturgies of the Church and realized that the Mass had had many different forms over the years. This awareness had some influence: in 1903 Pius X encouraged the ordinary people to sing Gregorian chant; in 1905 he invited people to make their communion more frequently, even daily, and in 1910 extended this to children who had reached the age of reason. From the 1920’s beautifully printed missals were made available with Latin and the vernacular on opposite pages so the people knew what was going on. In 1951 Pius XII restored the Easter Vigil; in 1955 the rest of Holy Week; and in 1958 a “dialogue Mass” was allowed. Change was under way.

The Mass of the Second Vatican Council

On October 28th 1958 Angelo Roncalli was elected the 261st Pope and chose the name John XXIII. He was 76 and expected to be a stop-gap Pope (in fact he only reigned 4 ½ years), but he called a new Ecumenical Council, the 21st in the history of the Church, which we now call Vatican II. It met from October 1962, nine months before John's death, until December 1965. The first complete document to be issued was *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, which was approved by the assembled bishops with a vote of 2,147 to 4 and promulgated by Pope Paul VI on December 4, 1963. The main aim was to achieve greater lay participation in the Catholic Church's liturgy but there was a very thorough revision, aided by the advice of great scholars, so the new (Latin) Missal only appeared on March 26, 1970. An English translation was ready by 1973.

Pope Paul VI noted these major changes when he presented the text to the Church:

- To the single Canon of the previous edition (which, with minor alterations, was preserved as the "First Eucharistic Prayer or Roman Canon") he added three alternative Eucharistic Prayers, increasing also the number of prefaces.
- The rites of the Order of Mass - that is, the largely unvarying part of the liturgy - were "simplified, while due care is taken to preserve their substance". "Elements which, with the passage of time, came to be duplicated, or were added with but little advantage" were eliminated, especially at the offertory, the breaking of the bread, and communion.
- "Other elements which have suffered injury through accidents of history are now to be restored to the earlier norm of the Holy Fathers", for example, the homily, the 'prayer of the faithful', and the penitential rite of the people.
- He greatly increased the proportion of the Bible read at Mass. In the Tridentine Mass only 1% of the Old Testament and 16.5% of the New Testament was read at Mass. In Pope Paul's revision, 13.5% of the Old Testament and 71.5% of the New Testament are read. He was able to do this by having three readings on Sundays, with a three-year cycle, and a two-year cycle on weekdays. Priests were encouraged to preach on the Scriptures.

A new Latin edition came out in 1975 and a third edition in 2000. New rules of translation from 2001 required a completely new English translation which took nearly ten years to prepare and which came into use at Advent of 2011.