

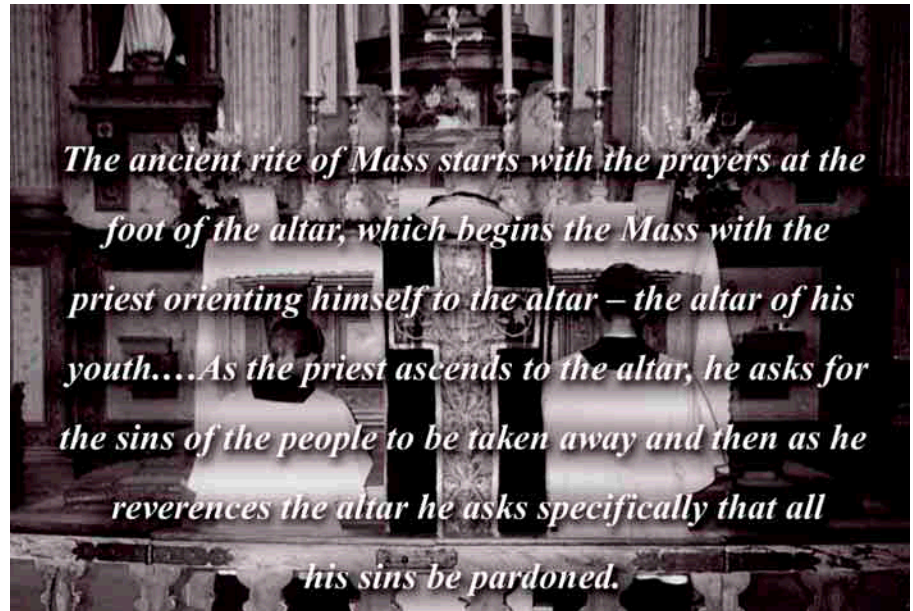
The Spirituality of the Ancient Liturgy

First of two parts

by Father Chad Ripperger, F.S.S.P.

Among liturgists and theologians, it is generally considered true that each form of ritual embodies a kind of spirituality which is proper to that ritual. Thus, for example, the Eastern rites tend to emphasize the mysterious aspects of the spiritual life as well as the role of icons in promoting devotion to Our Lord, Our Lady and the saints. The ancient rite of Mass embodies a spirituality and spiritual lessons that can appeal to every generation and time. By ancient ritual is meant that rite which was codified by St. Gregory the Great and which underwent a very slow organic development over the course of centuries. The last missal promulgated that enjoys that organic growth is that of 1962.

It is the common perception in the Church today that the liturgical development of the medieval period was, in fact, decadent and that we must return to the apostolic and early Church period in order to know what real liturgy is as well as God's will regarding the liturgy. This is, however, a fundamentally flawed notion. Aside from the fact that modern liturgical experts (and by modern I mean of the last 100 years or so) were not accurate in their understanding of the liturgies of the early Church, the notion that medieval liturgical development was somehow an aberration is really a rejection of what was an authentic development based upon the understanding of the Mass as sacrifice. Moreover, such figures like to harken back to an era when the liturgy was supposedly "pristine," by which they usually mean that it conformed to their faulty theology of the Mass as a meal.



The ancient rite of Mass starts with the prayers at the foot of the altar, which begins the Mass with the priest orienting himself to the altar – the altar of his youth....As the priest ascends to the altar, he asks for the sins of the people to be taken away and then as he reverences the altar he asks specifically that all his sins be pardoned.

The point here is not to give a history lesson, but to explain that one of the premises on which this essay is based is that the ancient rite of Mass is actually the product of the hand of God Who used saints throughout history to develop it according to His holy intention. The desire to reject our liturgical patrimony seems to me to be in fact a desire to reject those things which God has done. Insofar as it is the work of God and the saints, the liturgy embodies certain spiritual principles in the very nature of the ritual that are worthy of reflection. Obviously, we cannot exhaust them all, so we shall limit the discussion to four: 1) the awareness of our sinfulness, 2) the need for self-denial, 3) perfection in virtue and 4) certain aspects about prayer. All of these are essential elements of any sound spiritual life.

I. Awareness of Sin

The first is, again, an awareness of our own sinfulness. The ancient rite of Mass starts with the prayers at the foot of the altar, which begins the Mass with the priest orienting

himself to the altar – the altar of his youth. The altar is, of course, the place where the sacrifice for our sins takes place, and the priest asks God to judge his cause. Immediately, there is a clear understanding that there are good and bad in this world. Since the *Confiteor* is required in every Mass, the ancient ritual makes it clear to us that we have sinned and the priest, and later the people, confess their sins not only to God but also to the whole heavenly court – i.e., to specific saints as well as to all the saints in general. The priest himself must confess his sinfulness independently of the people, both as an example for them and a sign that the priest needs to be keenly aware of his own personal sinfulness. The priest asks to be washed and forgiven repeatedly throughout the ritual in order to foster a sense of humility and unworthiness before God to perform the function that belongs to him. No priest who takes the prayers seriously can be overcome with pride. As the priest ascends to the altar, he asks for the sins of the people to be taken away and then as he reverences the altar he asks

specifically that all his sins be pardoned.

There is of course the *Kyrie*, which is an appeal for God's mercy, and before the Gospel the priest asks again that his heart and lips be cleansed. Aside from the *Confiteor*, perhaps the most notable recollection for the priest for his sins is contained in the offertory prayer *Suscipe, sancte Pater*. The priest says during this prayer that he offers the spotless Host to "atone for my innumerable sins, offenses, and negligences."

It is necessary for the priest to remind himself constantly of his sinfulness and his proclivity to evil so that he will be motivated to root the sin out of his life. It is also necessary for the priest to do this so that he recognizes his unworthiness to offer the sacrifice and the need to strive for purity and holiness in order to offer it worthily. Since the first step toward sanctified perfection is to be aware of and admit to one's own sinfulness, these prayers are highly important for the spiritual lives of priests. None of us who are aware of the scandals and sins associated with priests over the past forty years should desire that these prayers be taken out of the offertory or Mass. The laity must desire that the priest be sinless, and one of the ways that is facilitated is by recognizing in the prayers at Mass that he is offering this sacrifice not only for the people but also for himself. If a priest has a sensitive conscience and knows that he must remain pure for the sake of offering the sacrifice, then he merits more graces from God for the people. Today people say that as long as the Mass is valid, the state of the priest does not really matter. While it is true that a priest does not have to be in the state of grace to offer the Mass validly, nevertheless, he has an obligation to be as holy as possible in order to merit more for those under his pastoral care.

There are of course two kinds of merit in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The first is Our Lord's own Sacrifice in which, by the hands of the priest, He is offered to God the Father in expiation for our sins. Here we are referring to the fact that the Mass is the participation in the Sacrifice of Calvary and the merit flowing from this Sacrifice is infinite since That Which is offered is Infinite. But in addition to this essential or primary merit, there is a secondary merit that flows from three things: (1) the holiness of the priest, (2) the holiness of the people who join their own particular sacrifices to the Sacrifice of the priest and (3) the ritual itself. In order for us to gain more fruits from the Mass, we must do everything we can to aid the priest in being holy, e.g., by offering our prayers and mortifications for him so that he will obtain a holiness of life. But this is possible only when the priest is constantly reminded of his ability to fall into sin if he does not rely on the grace of God. It does not help us to ignore this reality and remove it from the ritual. Rather, the awareness of our sinfulness is absolutely necessary for our spiritual advancement,

when the Church changed the ritual of the Mass, the Catholic subculture in this nation collapsed. The point here is that if we want to transform our culture, we must have a ritual that possesses a keen awareness of our sinfulness; if we expect our society to have an awareness of sin, the priest when he approaches the altar must have a sense of his sinfulness. Since all graces come into the world by means of the Catholic Church, if our ritual is deficient, then perhaps we are cheating the world of the graces that the ritual we offer is meant to convey.

II. Self Denial, Detachment and Mortification

The second spiritual aspect of the ancient ritual that is manifest in a number of ways in the old rite is the sense of self-denial and mortification. One of the clearest manifestations of this self-denial is the old rite's silence. When we meet someone who has the vice of loquacity, of talking too much, it is usually because the person is full of himself. It is a fact of human nature that any time we do something that is in accord with our physical dispositions, we get a certain pleasure from

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and the ancient ritual is not lacking in this regard.

The word culture comes from the Latin word "cultus." While our subject does not allow us to go too far into the discussion, we should be aware of the fact that the cult – that is, the liturgy or rituals of the predominant religion – actually determines the culture of the society. We have seen this historically during the Protestant revolts and we have even seen it in our own lifetimes:

it. People often speak of being in the "mood" for certain things and not others, and when they get the thing that corresponds to their mood, they experience a certain pleasure in it. Talking is much the same way: the appetites can become attached to talking, and this is precisely what the old rite militates against. By requiring the silence of the people, it provides an opportunity for the appetitive desire to talk to be stripped from those in attendance.

I have had many discussions with laity who come to the old rite for the first time and they often find an appetitive revulsion to the ritual because of the silence. They do not express it exactly that way, of course, but as they talk it becomes clear that they do not like the fact that they are not being talked at and not doing some of the talking themselves. St. John of the Cross used to say that before he would enter into mystical contemplation his “house,” as he called himself, became all quiet; and by this he meant that all of his appetites and faculties had quieted down. This is a sign to us that we must be quiet, we must be stripped of self in order to ascend the heights of perfection, and the old Mass aids that understanding. Moreover, it teaches us that we do not have to be the center of attention by talking in order for the ritual to have a deeper meaning and significance.

The old ritual also fosters a sense of detachment on the side of the priest and the people because the ritual is completely determined by Holy Mother the Church. We see in the Old Testament that God gave very detailed instructions on how He was to be worshiped. This is key in understanding the liturgy in two ways. The first is that the liturgy is

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not our action, it is the action of God by means of the priest; it is not something we do, it is essentially something God does, for the consecration cannot take place without God Who is the first cause of the

Sacrifice. The second way is that it is God, and not ourselves, Who determines how we will worship Him. This has been one of the most notable failings in modern times: a desire to determine for ourselves how we will worship God. It is erroneous because it is up to God to tell us the type of worship that pleases or displeases Him and, therefore, only He should be the one to determine the ritual. It was mentioned earlier that God had fashioned the liturgy over the course of time through the saints, who were filled with love of God – everything they did came from Him and led back to Him. The old rite teaches us the important spiritual lesson that if we are going to be holy and pleasing to God, then our task is to conform to the liturgy and not make the liturgy something of our own doing or make it conform to us.

Furthermore, since it is God who must determine the ritual, we learn that the Mass is not about us but about God. We are only a secondary aspect of the rite. This is made clear in the ancient ritual in that control over the liturgy is taken away from us, and we thereby recognize that it is not about us. While our desire is to benefit from the Mass, our benefit ultimately must be referred back to

God; that is to say, we become holy because it gives God greater glory. So even the aspects that affect us are ultimately about God.

The traditional rite, by determining how the ritual is to be done,

provides two important spiritual benefits for the priest. The first is peace, for he can go and conform himself to the will of God by following the rubrics of the Mass since they are predetermined; as a priest I cannot say what a great sense of freedom this gives. He does not have to fret over what he will choose and say because he is worried about what the congregation may think. He does not have to listen to a liturgical committee trying to tell him what to do. The second is that it teaches the priest self-denial and sometimes mortification when the ritual is out of his hands. The Mass is not about the priest; it does not have to be sustained by his personality. Obviously only a priest can offer the Mass, but he can lose and forget himself when the whole ritual is determined by the Church, which is the *Vox Dei*, the Voice of God. It makes it possible for him to forget himself and everything else so that he can perfectly enter into the mystery and the sacred realities present, and thereby derive the greatest benefit from them. In a most perfect fashion, he acts *in persona Christi* – in the person of Christ – because his own personality is minimized and he can become more like Christ. Since he says Mass facing God and not the people, his own personality, or lack thereof, is not what sustains the ritual. He is able to let his own personality fade into the background so that he can concentrate fully on attending to God. Here when we talk of service, the priest serves God first and foremost. Too often when the term “service” is used in conjunction with the priesthood, it usually means some type of social service, rather than its real meaning of service to God.

The old Mass has only two kinds of options, both of which are heavily regulated. The first is that on certain days, according to certain conditions,

votive Masses can be said; but that is something exterior to the ritual. The second is that under certain circumstances and on certain days, predetermined optional prayers may be added to the propers, e.g., to pray for rain, for peace, or something of this sort. But these are heavily regulated so that the priest understands that while he may choose to do them, when and

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how are not entirely up to him. The point is that options within the ritual should be minimized in order to foster obedience to superiors, self-denial and the reduction of self-will, all of which are necessary to the spiritual life. If many options are allowed, it actually militates against the priest's self-denial and it fosters self-will, since the ritual becomes subject to his choice. It also leaves him with the impression that the liturgy is really his doing rather than an action performed by God through him.

Lack of options teaches the priest detachment and it also teaches the laity self-denial because they know they cannot try to manipulate the priest to do in the liturgy what they want, since it is out of his hands. Detachment is key to any discussion of the liturgy and any sound spiritual life. Modern man has lost all detachment regarding the liturgy and he is constantly subjecting it to his appetites. But we need detachment, and any discussion of liturgical restoration requires that people first detach themselves from what they want so that they can know what God wants. Furthermore, the multitude of options and lack of detachment in the liturgy has led to a type of Immanentism. Immanentism is a

philosophy or notion which holds that everything of importance is about us and comes from us. If it is not from us, then it has no meaning or significance. Immanentism comes from the two Latin words *in* and *manere* which mean *to remain in*. Since man is incapable of reaching the heavens on his own (Babel and the Pelagian heresies have clearly

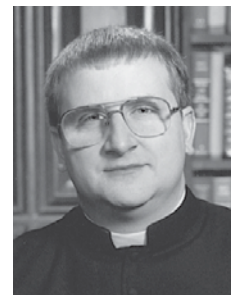
demonstrated that), the liturgy must be from God and about God in order to draw us out of ourselves and to foster any sense of the transcendent, the striving for which is deeply rooted in the heart of man.

The ancient liturgy also provides a depth to one's spiritual life for three reasons. The first is that it takes us out of ourselves and brings us to God; if we remain in ourselves and if we fashion a liturgy that is at our whim and ultimately about us, then we are doomed to shallowness and superficiality. Rather, insofar as the liturgy is out of our hands, we recognize that it is beyond us, it is mysterious, and insofar as it is about God, it can forever be contemplated. The second is that it is founded on tradition. Tradition provides a mechanism in which man can abandon himself to God who fashions the tradition rather than taking control of it himself and jettisoning the tradition. In other words, tradition provides a mechanism by which the spiritual and liturgical patrimony of the saints can be given to each generation, who can use it to their spiritual benefit. Like someone who does not know his historical roots and therefore does not know himself, modern man has chosen to reject liturgical tradition

and replace it with himself, only to be lost in self and never truly to understand himself. Tradition provides a way for the young to ground themselves in the wisdom of the past. This applies not only to cultural things but to the liturgy and the spiritual life as well.

The third thing that the ancient liturgy provides is repetition. Now modern man has rejected repetition because he has a fixation on novelty. Novelty, of course, gives our appetites delight but does not necessarily indicate depth. To enter into something in depth requires time and repeated considerations of a thing. *Repetitio mater discendi*, as we say in Latin: repetition is the mother of learning. This principle applies not only to learning but to our spiritual lives as well. By repeating a prayer, its meaning becomes more known to us and therefore is able to be entered into more perfectly and with greater depth. Since the ancient rite allows not for novelty but repetition, it provides a way in which people can focus on the *mysteria* present rather than the new things that are constantly popping up. With the silence quieting our faculties and the repetition that characterize each Mass, we are able to participate in and enter more perfectly into the mysteries of the Mass. Too often participation is equated with physical activity rather than the higher and more active form of participation which is spiritual participation. ✠
to be continued next issue

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The Spirituality of the Ancient Liturgy

Part Two — continued from the Summer 2001 issue

by Father Chad Ripperger, F.S.S.P.

Novelty begets spiritual gluttony.

By spiritual gluttony is understood the spiritual defect by which one takes delight and concerns oneself only with the physical and spiritual consolations sent by God rather than using the consolation as a means to growing more holy. Spiritual gluttony occurs when people do spiritual or religious things because of some consolation or delight they derive from them and so the delight, rather than God, becomes the end of the action. Novelty begets spiritual gluttony because people tend to think that

newer is always better, and so each new thing brings them some new delight. Here we see that novelty can easily degenerate into keeping people entertained, but the danger is that insofar as it prompts one to stop looking at God and fixating on the new thing that sates our appetites, it impedes our spiritual growth. All of the saintly spiritual writers warn that spiritual gluttony

is very dangerous for the spiritual life.

The ancient ritual actually destroys spiritual gluttony on three levels. First, all of the silence takes away from our appetites the desire to talk. It is a fact that some people like vocal prayer because of the “spiritual high,” to use a degenerate sixties and seventies term, that comes from doing the talking. Second, the repetition ensures that the appetites, which constantly want

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something new, are not satisfied. Repetition in a spiritual good is something that is appreciated on an intellectual level, not an appetitive level. Our appetites can get bored when we experience the same thing; the intellect, on the other hand, is able to see the value of the thing each time it encounters it. Thirdly, a certain pleasure comes from being

in control of something. This is another reason that the ritual must be fixed or determined by the Church and not by ourselves. For insofar as the ritual is determined by our choice among options and not according to the universal laws of the Church, we take a certain pleasure in being in control. But this to subordinate a spiritual good to our natural desires.

Moreover, while it is not part of the newer rituals themselves, some of the forms of music employed in them are used because of some sensible or appetitive pleasure derived from the music rather than for their usefulness in drawing the mind and will into closer union with God. This leads people to confuse the pleasurable experience with actually experiencing God. In effect, it leads people to think that authentic experiences of God are always pleasant. While in the next life they are, in this life the experiences of God are often arduous and exceedingly painful for us – not because of some defect in the way God handles us, but because of our imperfections and sinfulness which cause our pain. As Saint Theresa of Avila once said, “God, if this is the way you treat your friends, no wonder you have so few of them.”

The point is that music and all of the other aspects of the ritual should be geared toward weaning people

off sensible delights and consolations as the mainstay of their spiritual lives. This is why Gregorian chant which, has an appeal to the intellect and will, naturally begets prayer, which is defined as the lifting of the mind and heart to God. Gregorian chant does not appeal to one’s emotions or appetites; rather, the beauty of the chant naturally

draws us into contemplation of the divine truths and the mysteries of the ritual.

To return to our discussion of liturgical options, by having a predetermined ritual by the universal laws of the Church, one avoids having one person force his disposition and his own spiritual life or lack thereof on the rest of the people attending Mass. In other words, it avoids having someone impose himself or intrude on the spiritual lives of the laity by the choices he makes which flow from his own interior dispositions and spiritual life. Since people naturally differ in disposition, when the ritual becomes the product of one individual or even a few, it loses its spiritual appeal to the rest of the people, who may not share the same dispositions.

The traditional rite, on the other hand, avoids this pitfall by determining the ritual itself. One of the advantages of the ancient ritual is that it does not matter which parish you attend; it is everywhere the same. Insofar as the options of the new rite allow for the particularization of the ritual, it ceases being catholic (meaning *universal*). In fact, in an age of hyper-mobility, it seems especially imprudent to have changed the ritual. I realized this when I went to Rome and attended Mass in Italian. Had the Mass been in Latin according to the ancient rite, I would have felt right at home at Mass; instead, I was left with the impression that I was merely an onlooker from the outside. This is why Latin and a fixed ritual allow the Mass to have a universal appeal: one can attend it in every country, in every parish in the world and still feel right at home. While we may not understand the homily or sermon when we are in a foreign country, we can nevertheless enter into the ritual in the same depth and

fervor that we can at our home parish. This also avoids the unfortunate problem of people parish shopping, as it were, trying to find a priest whose choice of Mass options suits their own dispositions.

Latin also provides a form of self-denial by taking the translation of the ritual out of the hands of questionable agencies. Inclusive language is a classic example of what we have been describing: the desire of a small group to impose its own spirituality on everyone else. The desire for inclusive language is a manifestation of the expectation that the ritual should conform to the group rather than vice versa. Latin undermines this idea because everyone, as Pope

perfection in virtue. The old Mass, insofar as it strips us of self, humbles us. This is necessary, since every one of us suffers from pride. Moreover, by not giving us control over the ritual, the old rite begets meekness, the virtue by which one does not go to extremes in one's reactions or actions. There are countless stories of laity and priests being furious after attending the new rite because of something the celebrant did. The priest should not be the cause of anger during the Mass. By becoming the cause of anger, he erodes the meekness of the laity. Having a fixed ritual, provided the priest follows the rubrics and says the Mass reverently, minimizes the chance that the priest

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John XXIII says in *Veterum Sapientia*, is equal before the Latin language. Latin forces a type of self-denial on us because we can not manipulate the language to our own ends. It also thwarts the inclination of the priest to ad lib, foisting his own personal disposition on those attending the Mass.

The Latin, the fixed rubrics, these things strip us of our selves so that we can become nothing. Saint John of the Cross often noted that we must be nothing so that God can become everything in us, or, as in the words of Saint John the Baptist (which we can apply to the ancient ritual), "I must decrease, so that He may increase." Stripping ourselves of self, which the ancient ritual does, is a requirement for any authentic spirituality.

III. Perfection in Virtue

This brings us to the next topic:

will anger the laity. In this way, the old rite assures meekness.

Humility is the root virtue in the concupiscible appetite, i.e., the thing in us that inclines us toward bodily goods. Humility is the virtue by which one does not judge oneself greater than he is. Saint Thomas Aquinas tells us it is the root virtue of all the other virtues and that no other virtue can exist without it. The old Mass roots out pride and begets humility because it is not our action or our product but the product and action of God. Moreover, by coming up against the mysterious which for us in this life is insurmountable, it naturally causes in us a sense of our smallness in comparison to God. This in turn tempers the way we behave because we are in the presence of someone who causes "awe," which is an overwhelming sense of wonder or admiration. "Awe" naturally

causes us to stop and consider ourselves in the light of that which is awesome; it captivates us and therefore moderates what we do. The ancient ritual, in begetting humility and meekness – upon which all the other virtues rest – reminds us of the words of Christ, Who said, “Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart.” In other words, “I conform myself to the truth, I am not proud and do not judge myself greater than I am, I do not go to extremes in my reactions.” This is what we must desire in any ritual. The ritual should speak to us – not in our own words, but in the words of Christ. In this way the ancient ritual can be seen to be saying metaphorically, “Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.”

Once meekness and humility are in place, the virtue of reverence naturally follows. Reverence is the virtue contained under the more universal virtue of justice, and more particularly religion, in which one holds in honor and esteem some thing, usually sacred. The ancient ritual helps us to honor those things that are holy because, first, we are humble and recognize the greatness of sacred things. Secondly, we approach God in a sense of self-denial and subservience, and in this respect the ancient ritual excels. For the priest bows his head, genuflects

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and humbles himself often in the prayers that God might look upon his actions and be pleased.

Fortitude is also taught in the ancient ritual, if in no other way than that it is clear that it is spiritual warfare. At the very beginning, when the priest vests by putting on

the amice, he says a prayer in which he asks Our Lord for the helmet of salvation so that he can fight off the incursions of the devil. Also, since the priest is not subject to a liturgical committee in making decisions on what should and should not be done, the traditional rite strengthens the priest and reaffirms the masculine aspects of being a priest.

Here we highly recommend the article by Father James McLucas on the emasculation of the priesthood, (*The Latin Mass*, Spring 1998) in which he argues that the newer rituals have, in fact, taken away from the priest those things that are masculine: e.g., the role of providing for and protecting his spiritual family. In the ancient ritual, he alone feeds his spiritual family by distributing Holy Communion. This also means he can protect the sacred mysteries. The systematic removal of all these things that emphasize the masculine and fatherly role of the priest has weakened our vision of the priesthood. Moreover, we tend to get what we offer as an example. Thus, if we place before

people a weakened view of the priesthood that has little or no virtue of fortitude, then we can expect priests to become weak and

effeminate, and attract seminarians who follow suit. Fortitude is defined as engaging the arduous good and the ancient ritual provides an avenue for the priest to obtain the greatest and most difficult type of fortitude: self-discipline through self-denial.



The ancient ritual also avoids violations of justice. The new Code of Canon Law states that the laity have a right to attend the liturgy said according to the rubrics. Now all the options have eroded the sense that the priest must render to the people their due; the flow of the Mass is at his discretion. This leads the priest to think that he can do whatever he likes. While Church documents are clear that he cannot do so, the fact is that all these options contain the implicit principle of “do what you want.” This is why, when the ritual is out of the hands of the priest, it naturally begets a sense of the requirement of justice in all of us. For when the priest does something that is contrary to the rubrics, or even in the rubrics but included as optional, it gives people a sense that the priest is concerned not so much about what God wants as about what he wants, especially if one attending the Mass does not like the particular option. Ultimately, the ritual of the Mass is about God, and ought to seek the best way of rendering to God His due. This comes through a deep sense of justice. Through the sacrifice to God and the conformity of the ritual to that sacrifice, we recognize that with respect to God, we have no claim of justice insofar as we are mere creatures. Therefore, the Mass must be about God and not

ourselves. The ancient ritual helps us to forget and lose ourselves in the rendering of justice to God through the Sacrifice.

The ancient rite begets faith, hope and charity. It begets faith because it excels in its expression of Catholic theology. Faith comes through hearing and we hear the Faith in the very prayers of the ancient ritual. It begets hope because of its deep sense of the transcendent and our participation in the transcendent. It begets charity because it helps us to realize that worship is about God, not us. Charity is defined as love of God and neighbor *for the sake of God*. Even when we love our neighbor, it must be for the sake of God. Hence the ritual helps us to focus everything on God, thereby giving a proper direction to our spiritual lives. Even if this were not the case, the ancient ritual begets charity if for no other reason than that it keeps people's imperfections at bay by taking away the ability of one person to impose himself on another, thereby averting anger, hurt feelings and the like.

IV. Ascendance in Prayer

The last aspect is ascendance in prayer. We have already mentioned the silence that is necessary to ascend the heights of prayer. While it is not required for vocal prayer, it is required for mental prayer and the other seven levels of prayer. Saint Augustine said that no person can save his soul if he does not pray. Now it is a fact that mental prayer and prayer in general have collapsed among the laity (and the clergy, for that matter) in the past thirty years. It is my own impression that this development actually has to do with the ritual of the Mass. Now in the new rite, everything centers around vocal prayer, and the communal aspects of

the prayer are heavily emphasized. This has led people to believe that only those forms of prayer that are vocal and communal have any real value. Consequently, people do not pray on their own any longer.

The ancient ritual, on the other hand, actually fosters a prayer life. The silence during the Mass actually teaches people that they must pray. Either one will get lost in distraction during the ancient ritual or one will pray. The silence and encouragement to pray during

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the Mass teach people to pray on their own. While, strictly speaking, they are not praying on their own insofar as they should be joining their prayers and sacrifices to the Sacrifice and prayer of the priest, these actions are done interiorly and mentally and so naturally dispose them toward that form of prayer. This is one of the reasons that, after the Mass is said according to the ancient ritual, people are naturally quieter and tend to pray afterwards. If everything is done vocally and out loud, then once the vocal stops, people think it is over. It is very difficult to get people who attend the new rite of Mass to make a proper thanksgiving by praying afterward because their appetites and faculties have habituated them toward talking out loud.

The ancient ritual also gives one a taste of heaven, so to speak. Since the altar marks the dividing line between the profane and sacred, between the heavenly and the earthly, and the priest ascends to the altar to offer Sacrifice, the traditional rite leaves one with a sense of being drawn into heaven with the

priest. This feature naturally draws us into prayer and gives the sense of the transcendent and supernatural that are key in the spiritual life. The numerous references to the saints foster devotion rather than minimizing it. The Latin provides a sense of mystery. The beauty of the ritual, the surroundings that naturally flow from the ritual itself (such as the churches that are designed for the ritual), the chant – all of these things lead to contemplation, the seeking after that which is above.

Conclusion

Clearly we have not exhausted all the spiritual aspects of the ancient ritual, but the four areas we covered demonstrate

that the ancient ritual and the newer forms have different spiritualities. If the Church is to capture the sense of the transcendent for the laity, if we are to have humble and saintly priests, if we are to have a ritual that is driven by charity and therefore has God as the sole focus of our longings and desires, it must restore that liturgy that God Himself fashioned both when Christ was on earth and through the loving hands of the saints throughout history. We cannot be satisfied with a liturgy that is the work of our own hands. For this reason, I do not subscribe to the theory that we need to produce yet another ritual. We need the work of God back, because if the ancient ritual does anything, it teaches us that we do not need our own self-expression. We need God. ✠

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