



Catechesis For the Masses

Basic Teachings on Liturgy and Participation in the Mass in Both Forms.

Part 10: Liturgical Changes: How they are Brought About and Made Acceptable.

“**T**he only thing that is constant is change.” While this expression may seem more of clever play on words than a well-known cliché, it characterizes how things in life are always in motion. Every day brings us new moments of learning, new opportunities, new invitations to relationship, and the like. By acknowledging that life is always changing, we open ourselves to all of these possibilities and the fruits to be borne of them.

Yet, when it comes to our life in the Catholic Church, it may appear that things can never change. Sometimes, it may even seem as though the Church is unwilling to accept change such that it would rather lose people than make changes. While certain areas are not subject to change - such as the Truth itself, who is Jesus Christ - many other areas of the life of the Church do change (such as the manner by which we may express the core truth, which can be clarified and explained in new or “changed” ways.)

One area of the life of the Church that remains open to change is her way of worship. Yes, the worship of Church has changed and continues to change as she leads us on our pilgrim journey through this life. Given our purpose in this series of reflecting upon the Mass itself and the two forms by which we are able to offer the Mass, might we consider how real change has happened in the Mass through the centuries - and in particular in the 20th Century. In making this consideration, might we remain rooted in what is unchanging: that we are called by God to be united with Him in the eternal life of heaven.

In a survey of change in the liturgy through the centuries, what might be emphasized of first order

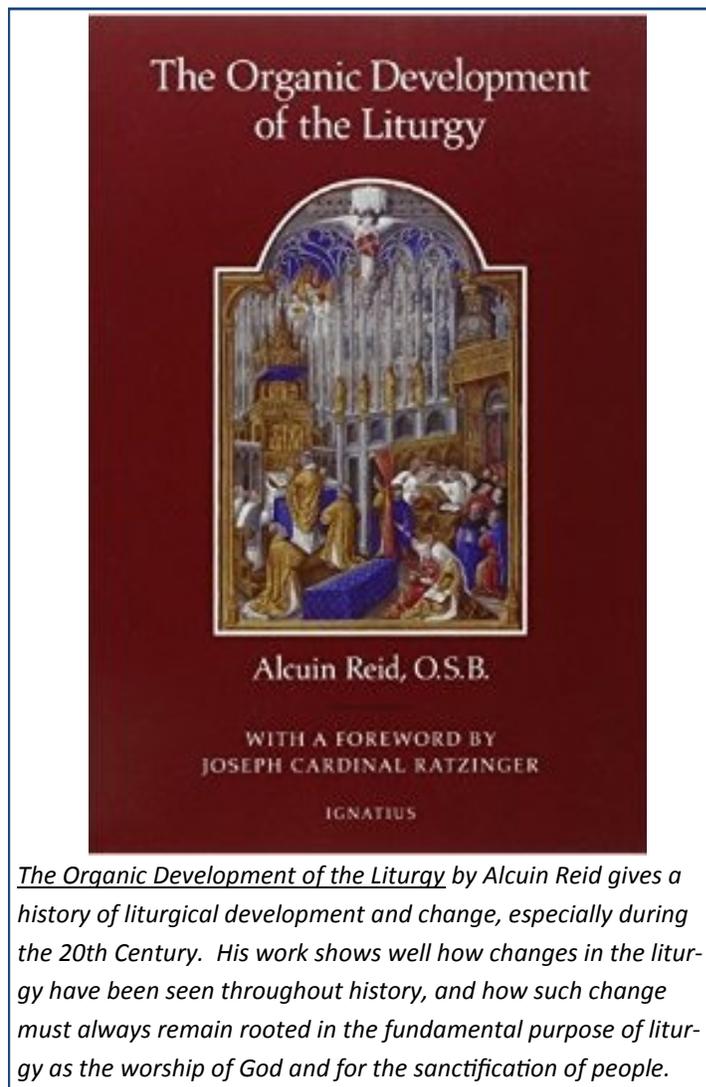
is how certain elements of worship are not meant to change. Back in Part 2 of this series when considering how worship is necessarily founded upon what God Himself has instituted and accomplished on our behalf, we were shown how attempts to worship which are not instituted by God become focused on ourselves and worship therefore loses its proper meaning. That worship is handed down to us by divine institution has always and will always remain the same. Accordingly, that the Eucharist is the sacramental “re - presentation” of the one sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, offered to the Father for expiation of our sins will always be true. If this fundamental truth was ever to be changed, the act would no longer be the Eucharist and therefore not what God Himself gave us - even if it still contained many of the same ritual actions.

As true worship is divinely instituted, it logically follows that any invention of worship is neither possible nor proper. In other words, we cannot invent the way to God, who invites us to take part in what He Himself offers to us - for as was also said in Part 2 of this series, we who are limited cannot attain He who is infinite by our own efforts alone. Practically speaking, this means that true worship does not belong to us to define and implement. That humans do not have first authority over worship is even enshrined in Vatican II’s “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” wherein paragraph 22 directly states that while regulation of the liturgy belongs to the proper authority of the Holy See and in particular instances to the bishops, its unchanging and divinely instituted elements are to be held in such esteem that “no other person, even if he be a priest, may add, remove, or change anything in the liturgy on his own authority.”

On the other hand, certain elements of the worship (such as language, customary postures and gestures, and the like) are open to legitimate change based upon circumstances. To these items, Vatican II's "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy" gives the following direction regarding legitimate change in the rituals in paragraph 21:

"In order that the Christian people may more certainly derive an abundance of graces from the sacred liturgy, holy Mother Church desires to undertake with great care a general restoration of the liturgy itself. For the liturgy is made up of immutable elements divinely instituted, and of elements subject to change. These not only may, but ought to be changed with the passage of time if they have suffered from the intrusion of anything out of harmony with the inner nature of the liturgy or have become unsuited to it."

Lest we think that the liturgy underwent no changes prior to Vatican II, it is right to note here that even in the 1950s up to the beginning of Vatican II in 1962, there were changes in the Mass. Among them were modifications made by Pope Pius XII for celebrating Holy Week in 1955, and the inclusion of the name of St. Joseph in the Roman Canon (aka, Eucharistic Prayer I) and the removal of the altar server's reciting of the Confiteor immediately before receiving Holy Communion in 1962. What legitimizes these changes? What legitimizes *any* changes? The key toward understanding legitimate change is contained in what has already been presented here in broader contexts: that the divinely instituted elements must be unchanged and elements that are linked to passage of time, particular settings, etc., can be subject to change if they are seen as out of harmony with the meaning and purpose of worship. Finally, as Vatican II has said, such change is to be administered by those to whom it has been rightly entrusted, namely the Pope and the bishops. Yet, that is not the whole story....



As a concluding thought, it is important to make note of the power of lived faith to bring about authentic change. While the references in the article may make it appear as though worship can only change "because the Pope and bishops said so," the truth is that each of us can effect real change in the liturgy, insofar as we are humble disciples of Christ. To give a recent example: Pope Benedict XVI's statement from 2007, *Summorum Pontificum*, that gave clear place to the Extraordinary Form of the Mass, is a moment wherein the life of the faithful helped to bring about change - through their desire to be able to participate in this offering of the Mass. While this is a single and very particular example, know that when we are wholly and humbly devoted to Jesus, he can work great things through us - that can lead to real change for our good and the good of all His holy Church.