



# Catechesis For the Masses

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

## Part 12: Celebrating the Extraordinary Form Mass: Proper Ministries

As one of the main purposes of this series of bulletin inserts is the explaining, comparing, and contrasting of the two forms of the ritual for celebrating Mass in the Roman Catholic Church, the next two columns will serve to provide further comparison and distinction between the two ritual forms by focusing on the particular ministers and ministries that are to be found in each form. To that end, we will begin in this column by speaking of ministers and ministries of the “Extraordinary Form” Mass (the ritual as given in the *Roman Missal* of 1962). In the next insert, we will focus on showing the ministers and ministries of the “Ordinary Form” Mass (that is, the ritual for Mass in the most recent *Roman Missal*, issued in 2000).

In earlier columns of this series, (particularly Parts 2 and 4), it was shown that *the meaning of true worship has always remained consistent, even if the manner by which worship is offered has changed over time.* When it comes to the exploration of the ministers and ministries of the two current forms of the Holy Mass, this principle of the “timelessness of true worship” must be kept in the front of our minds, lest we interpret the differences in ministers and ministries incorrectly. In particular, it is of fundamental importance that we recognize that all who minister at the altar in either form of Mass are first and foremost members of the baptized, sharing in the need of saving grace as much as (if not more than) those who come and pray without any notoriety. Likewise, those who carry out the visible ministries always are meant to do so *as offerings of themselves in union with Christ on behalf of the faithful,* and not as though their service itself makes their par-

ticipating in the Mass more complete or fruitful than others without such roles. Keeping in mind these principles and acknowledging that the end goal of both forms of the Mass is the offering of worship to God and sanctification to the faithful, we can rightly consider the ministries of each form of the Mass in a consistent (and non-conflicting) manner.

Prior to changes that came in the wake of Vatican II, the ministries of the Mass were very particular and precise - beginning with those carried out by the priest himself. Accordingly, it is quite easy to identify each minister and the ministry that is being carried out - as each one is to do only those elements that pertain to the capacity in which they are serving.

The best place to see defined roles of each of these ministries is to look at the 1962 missal itself, in the section called the “Ritus Servandus,” which details how the Mass is to be offered. Within these instructions, the various roles are referred to by way of explaining what each one does. Among these roles are that of the priest, deacon, subdeacon, and acolytes or servers, one or more of whom may serve as master of ceremonies, as a thurifer, as torch bearers, and/or acolyte. (It is to be noted that today an “acolyte” is an officially instituted ministry, typically given to men who are preparing for ordination; however, when there are no “instituted acolytes,” others may carry out these roles as “servers”).

These various roles, while they are to be rightly carried out in the Extraordinary Form Mass according to right level of solemnity (that is, as a Low Mass, as a *Missa Cantata* [that is, as a “Sung Mass,”] etc.), today there exists some difficulty with regards to the fulfill-

ment of these roles. For in 1972, Pope Paul VI issued an apostolic letter wherein such orders as “subdeacon” were suppressed, and those roles that were once considered “minor orders” were either suppressed or changed to be considered “ministries,” received by institution (rather than ordination). By way of his letter, the retained ministries down to today are those of “lector” and “acolyte,” with the ministries given by ordination consisting of deacons, priests, and bishops.

Another reality of the Extraordinary Form Masses is the particular delineation of numbers for each role. At any Mass, there is only one priest who is the celebrant; if any other priests are present, they may participate “in choir” by praying the Mass without being the main celebrant, or they may assume one of the lesser roles of deacon, subdeacon, master of ceremonies, or the like. Such assuming of an alternate role, however, does not constitute the priest “offering the Mass.” (In other words, whereas in the post-Vatican II Mass, there is the option for more than one priest to offer a single Mass by means of “concelebration,” no such possibility is found in the Extraordinary Form of the Mass). Likewise, when multiple deacons are present, one of these deacons usually takes the role of subdeacon (in a Solemn High Mass), or both of them might serve other lower roles if the Mass is not a Solemn High Mass - such as master of ceremonies or acolyte. Given the changes made by Paul VI in 1972, such assuming of lower roles by the ordained is now necessary whenever a Solemn High Mass is offered - as there are no longer subdeacons to fulfill that role, and therefore those who are *at least* deacons must carry it out.

In addition to these roles at the altar itself is the role of the “schola cantorum,” or what we might more familiarly call the musicians. This role is essen-



*The offering of a Solemn High Mass requires the ministries of deacon (to the immediate right of the priest) and subdeacon (directly behind the priest), along with a master of ceremonies and several servers who tend to such elements as incense, the placement of the missal, and the patens for Holy Communion.*

tial in all Extraordinary Form Masses that have singing, as it is this schola who typically offers all of the sung responses to the priest (and not the congregation). In addition, the schola sings such chants as those at the beginning of the Mass (what is called the “Introit”) and the prayers and acclamations (such as the “Gloria,” the “Creed,” the “Holy, Holy, Holy,” etc.). Accordingly, to be part of the schola is a true ministry offered as part of the worship of the Mass.

One may observe here that the congregation itself appears to have little in the way of “visible,” or “external” activity in the Extraordinary Form Mass. We will be in better position to consider this apparent “lack” in the next column (that considers the ministries of the “Ordinary Form” of the Mass). As we look ahead, it bears repeating that any ministries at Mass are not meant for the sake of the individual alone who offers them - but as an offering in union with Christ who offers Himself on our behalf. Therefore, as we continue this look at the various ministries, might we remain mindful that true participation in Mass is centered on what Christ does on our behalf.