



Catechesis For the Masses

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

Part 13: Celebrating the Ordinary Form Mass: Proper Ministries

In the last insert, we introduced the ministries within the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite of Mass. In laying out these particular ministries, there was also the recognition that in the Extraordinary Form Mass these ministries have both very precise delineations and how in some instances some of these ministries must be fulfilled by ministers who might otherwise have served a different role (such as a deacon serving as “subdeacon”). In this column, we shift our attention to the ministries in the “Ordinary Form” of the Mass - that is, the Mass offered by way of the *Roman Missal* given in the year 2000 (the current edition of the *Roman Missal*), immediately acknowledging that there have been several changes from the Extraordinary Form. While these “outward” changes may be very clear, it is necessary to give a reminder that while manner of worshiping may have changed, the *meaning of worship has always remained the same.*

Whereas the delineation of ministries in the Extraordinary Form Mass is very particular, those in the Ordinary Form are in some instances particular, while in others more general. The ministries with particularities are especially the roles of the ordained and of those instituted for the particular ministries of “lector” and “acolyte.” When it comes to the ordained, it is typical that a priest always functions as a priest - either as the main celebrant of the Mass, or as one who “concelebrates” with the main celebrant, carrying out some of the postures and gestures of the main celebrant while saying many of the same prayers in a low, quiet voice. Likewise, the role of the deacon is very particular, including such elements as proclaiming the Gospel and preparing the altar. However, like

in the Extraordinary Form, if there is no deacon, this role can be fulfilled by a priest, with the difference that the priest can also concelebrate while fulfilling the deacon’s tasks during an Ordinary Form Mass.

While other particularities could most certainly be shown for the clergy, what is perhaps of greater interest here are the ministries of the Ordinary Form Mass that are envisioned for the laity. The Extraordinary Form, of course, includes roles for the laity (particularly for altar servers and for the musicians). However, our last column left off with a very real observation that visible and external participation in this form of the Mass *by the members of the congregation* appears to be lacking. To this end, it is important to make a real distinction that is found in both forms of the Mass but is clearly more visible in the Ordinary Form: *that the carrying out of a “ministry” is not a true measure of whether or not one is fully participating.* To make a case for this distinction between ministries and participation we will give a brief look at the particular ministries that are found in the Ordinary Form, mindful of the principle given in the last column that ministries are meant to be offered in union with Christ on behalf of the faithful - and not merely for the sake of the person who ministers to be able to participate.

Recalling the apostolic letter of Paul VI from 1972 wherein the so-called “minor orders” (such as subdeacon) were suppressed, it is of primary note that the most proper lay ministries of the Ordinary Form which remain are those of “lector,” and “acolyte.” However, since these ministries are formally received in a ceremony best referred to as “institution,” with

such institution being given by a bishop, and as the proper recipients of these ministries are almost always men who are preparing for ordination to diaconate and/or priesthood, there is clearly a need for others to fulfill the tasks that are otherwise carried out by these lectors and acolytes. Just as the Extraordinary Form contains “instructions” which tell of the various ministries and roles, so too the Ordinary Form *Roman Missal* contains instructions that include the proper roles and ministries found within this form of Mass - in the section called the “General Instruction of the Roman Missal,” (GIRM).

Chapter III of the GIRM is entirely devoted to the duties and ministries found in the Mass. After a brief description of the three grades of Holy Orders (that is, of the bishop, of a priest, and of a deacon), multiple paragraphs are devoted to the functions and ministries of the faithful. At the top of this list is a reminder that true participation in the Mass (that is, what is elsewhere called “fully conscious and active participation”) is realized above all by such acts as listening and meditating on the spoke words of Scripture and of prayers, the giving of the proper responses, the carrying out of postures and gestures in fitting moments, etc. In other words, the most proper ministry of all is to “learn to offer” ourselves in union with Christ according to our place in the body.

As for particular lay ministries, the GIRM first points out the proper roles of the acolyte and the lector (not unlike how it specifies proper functions of the clergy). However, in the absence of an instituted acolyte, other lay people may be “deputed” to carry out the functions of assisting with the cross, candles, bread, wine, water, etc., and even (if truly necessary) to assist with distributing Holy Communion. Likewise, in the absence of a lector, other members of the laity may once more be “deputed” to proclaim the readings. As in the Extraordinary Form, the role of the “schola cantorum,” or choir is to carry out singing of Mass responses and other chants and/or hymns, mindful of those parts meant to be sung by the con-



In the Ordinary Form of the Mass, many priests may share in the offering of one Mass (through “concelebration”) Pictured here is the bishop with concelebrating priests standing behind him, along with deacons assisting him at the altar during a recent Chrism Mass. Used with permission of The Northern Cross.

gregation with them. Finally, the GIRM makes reference to such roles as master of ceremonies, sacristan, “commentator,” “those who take up the collections,” and those whom we call greeters and/or ushers, noting that any roles not proper to the clergy mentioned within these paragraphs may be designated for lay people by either “a liturgical blessing or a temporary deputation,” depending if the role will be carried out multiple times or only once.

Given the apparent variety of lay ministries of the Ordinary Form, it bears repeating that the end goal of any and all such visible ministries is as service *on behalf of the people*. That is, carrying out of a formalized ministry does not directly equal “active participation,” which all of the faithful are called to do primarily as an “interior” act of offering oneself in union with Christ. Instead, these ministries are meant to assist all the faithful in that full participation in the Mass.

In closing, while the two forms of the Mass clearly have many differences, what must be remembered is (and I repeat it again) that the *manner of worship may have changed, but the meaning of worship is to be the same*. Therefore, at both forms of Mass, the end goal is to worship Jesus Christ, who *offered Himself on our behalf*, the we might be drawn into more perfect life and communion with Him.