

Pastor's Pen: Liturgical Dos and Don'ts

In the Catholic Church we have a book called The General Instruction of the Roman Missal. The Roma Missal is the book that is used for Mass. It has all the prayers that can be used for Mass. It usually sits on our altar. The Church has a very definite idea of what Mass should look like and what its directionality should be. In its early paragraphs, the Church makes clear that the ministerial priesthood and the priesthood of the faithful complement each other but should not be confused with one another. It also makes clear that the priest, musicians, or any other liturgical ministers or committees lack the authority to change anything in the General Instruction. In other words, the Mass is not a blank slate on which we superimpose our own whims and desires.

Last year, Pope Francis released the controversial *Custodes Traditiones*. In it he called for two things. The first was the limiting of the rites used prior to 1965. This has gotten much press and many bishops acted rather quickly to address this end. However, in the same document he also called for an ending of the abuses within the current form of the Mass. This has gotten almost no press and is a far greater issue. Ideally, the *Novus Ordo* (the Mass celebrated in most parishes) should have the same quality as the Latin Mass. It should look the same from parish to parish in its structure.

In this pastor's pen, I am not seeking to chide or condemn. No, I am looking to tweak some things that have been allowed in and even taught by former pastors. There are a few spots where we have what is called a lacuna; that means the General Instruction says nothing. In those instances, I will say where I come down and have the authority to institute. Since I am writing to all four parishes, some of these things are specific to one parish but need to be heard by all.

Music

For Sunday Masses, Music should be present. The music should be known and singable by a congregation. Music is to avoid all pretense of being a performance. Music is there to give glory to God. Ideally, the entrance and communion rite have what are called Antiphons particular to that Mass; usually they are akin to Responsorial Psalm in that they have the antiphon and accompanying psalmody. Singing hymns is fine, but it's the least option of the options the Church gives. The General Instruction still sees the prominence of chant as the norm in Mass; this is what Vatican II in its constitution on the Liturgy "*Sancrosacntum Concilium*" envisioned as well. I would like to see us move toward this for Sunday Masses over this year.

A good rule of thumb with music is that it should give glory to God. I would prefer our musicians choose music that reflects this. We have far too many songs where we sing about ourselves. One per Mass is more than enough.

In Macon, we have a long history of Sunday Masses without music. That really must end. We are talking about moving the organ, piano, and cantors back into the choir loft. First, this lessens the feeling of performing and second, I have found where the music is in the loft, I have no problem getting musicians and cantors. In our last school board, we talked about having someone come in to teach piano and organ so that over time we have many who can play.

Here I will say that applause is always inappropriate at Mass. Pope Benedict XVI talked about applause at Mass (save when it is called for by the ritual) takes the glory due God in Mass and gives it to a human being. Instead, I would suggest, after Mass, telling the musician or cantor what a wonderful job they did.

Orans Position

I know in two of my parishes, a past pastor, many years ago, taught the people to do what is called the Orans Position during the Our Father. I know some retreat movement encourage the same thing. The Orans Position is the holding your hands up as does the priest. There is nothing in the General Instruction forbidding it. It was a lacuna. It was not until 4 or 5 years ago when the Congregation for Divine Worship forbade it. I know no one here was told. It is forbidden though, as it confuses the role of the ministerial priest (you will notice the deacon doesn't do it) with the priesthood of the faithful.

As to holding hands during the Our Father, that remains a lacuna. I have no opinion. No one should be forced to do it. And the Orans position is not to be done during "For the Kingdom, The power..."

Blessing of those who do not or cannot receive Communion

This is a lacuna as well. You have had pastors in the past with very strong feelings about this. Some disallowed it. I am allowing it with certain provisions. First, the person coming up is not touched. This is not a formal blessing. Also, that a formal blessing in the name of the Trinity is not done. This turns it into a liturgical act which not called for. I, myself, just simply "May God bless you." This blessing is by no means co-equal with the reception of the Blessed Sacrament and should not be treated as such.

Next week I will deal the Reception of Communion and how is properly done and a few other issues.