



On December 4, 1963, the bishops who participated in the Second Vatican Council in union with Pope Paul VI issued a document entitled "The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy." In it, they called for a revision of the prayers of the Mass which would, of course, **"preserve their substance" but also make adjustments** in them so as **to increase the participation and devotion of the faithful.**

In addition, in the same "Constitution," the bishops with the Holy Father noted that **"the use of the mother tongue** (the vernacular of a particular area), whether in the Mass, the administration of the sacraments, or other parts of the liturgy, **may** frequently be of great advantage to the people" and, accordingly, proposed a translation of the Latin texts of the liturgy into the vernaculars of the world and their appropriate use under the direction of ecclesiastical authorities.

All of this was done for no other reason than better to assist the members of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ in their prayer. **Unfortunately, however, some felt** that what the bishops and the Holy Father had decided was either mistaken theologically, disdainful of ancient uses or uncaring as regards the sentiments of those who had been reared in the established liturgy and both revered and loved it. Indeed, a community of clergy, religious and laity under the leadership of a French Archbishop who had been a missionary in Africa rejected the liturgy that was developed after the Council and separated itself

from the Church **because of it and other Conciliar teachings and directives.**

Thus it was that in 1984 the Congregation for Divine Worship published a document with the Latin title, "Quattuor Abhinc Annos," making the traditional liturgy more available and Pope John Paul II in 1988 published another with the Latin title, "Ecclesia Dei," making it even more available. It was hoped that these measures would put an end to the various feelings of discontent and especially to the aforementioned separation, and **to some extent they were successful.** Still, our present Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, was convinced that **something further needed to be done;** and this is the origin of the document that he issued regarding the liturgical prayer of the Church this past July 7th.

In briefest terms, here is what the document, which is entitled in Latin "Summorum Pontificum," provides:

I. There is one Eucharistic liturgy for members of the Roman Catholic Church of the Latin Rite. It has two forms ("expressions") -- an "ordinary" one that is to be found in the Missal of Pope Paul VI published in 1970, and an "extraordinary" one that is to be found in the Missal of Blessed John XXIII published in 1962.

II. The "ordinary" form (usually identified as the Missal of Pope Paul VI) is the one to be used regularly.

III. The "extraordinary" form (usually identified as the Missal of Blessed John XXIII) may, however, be used --

A. in Masses where the priest does not have a congregation, except on Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday,

B. in Masses of religious communities in their chapels and oratories and

C. in parishes where a group of the faithful requests it, **but only once** on a Sunday or feast day.

There are, though, three more provisions in the new norms which are of interest mostly to the clergy. All the same, it might be well to at least mention them here.

I. **Pastors are to agree "willingly" to the "extraordinary" form in their parishes.** If, however, there is a problem in this regard, the matter should be referred to the local bishop; and if there is a further problem, to the Holy See.

II. Pre-Vatican II rites may be used for Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, Matrimony and the Anointing of the Sick, "as the good of souls suggests."

III. When Mass is celebrated in the "extraordinary" form, **the Readings may be in the vernacular.**

And to all of this our Holy Father, in a letter to the bishops of the world, added three further points.

I. The changes in the liturgy do not in any sense detract from the authority of the Second Vatican Council.

II. Priests who choose to celebrate Mass in the "extraordinary" form must have a **sufficient knowledge of the Latin language to pronounce the words correctly.**

III. The changes in the liturgy must not be the occasion of divisions in the Church. They are rather to strengthen the unity of that community of believers for whom the Lord prayed on the night before he died that "they may be one as You, Father, in Me and I in You" (John 17:21).

There is room within it for all expressions of what is Catholic, noble and holy; and for this each of us, whatever our tastes and inclinations, should be grateful to the Lord."

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