

Apostolic Letter  
In the form of “Motu Proprio”  
SUMMORUM PONTIFICUM

BENEDICT XVI

*The following **unofficial** translation has been prepared by the USCCB Secretariat for the Liturgy.  
Only the Latin original of the Apostolic Letter may be considered the official text.*

It has always been the care of the Supreme Pontiffs until the present time, that the Church of Christ offer worthy worship to the Divine Majesty “for the praise and glory of his name” and “for the good of all his Holy Church.”

As from time immemorial so in the future the principle shall be respected “according to which each particular Church must be in accord with the universal Church not only regarding the doctrine of the faith and sacramental signs, but also as to the usages universally handed down by apostolic and unbroken tradition. These are to be maintained not only so that errors may be avoided, but also so that the faith may be passed on in its integrity, since the Church's rule of prayer (*lex orandi*) corresponds to her rule of belief (*lex credendi*).”<sup>1</sup>

Among Pontiffs who have displayed such care there excels the name of Saint Gregory the Great, who saw to the transmission to the new peoples of Europe both of the Catholic faith and of the treasures of worship and culture accumulated by the Romans in preceding centuries. He gave instructions for the form of the Sacred Liturgy of both the Sacrifice of the Mass and of the Divine Office as was celebrated in the City. He made the greatest efforts to foster monks and nuns, who militating under the Rule of St Benedict, in every place along with the proclamation of the Gospel by their life likewise exemplified that most salutary expression of the Rule “let nothing be given precedence over the work of God” (ch. 43). In this way the sacred liturgy according to the Roman manner made fertile not only the faith and piety but also the culture of many peoples. Moreover it is evident that the Latin Liturgy in its various forms has stimulated in the spiritual life very many Saints in every century of the Christian age and strengthened in the virtue of religion so many peoples and made fertile their piety.

However, in order that the Sacred Liturgy might more efficaciously absolve its task, several others among the Roman Pontiffs in the course of the centuries have brought to bear particular concern, among whom Saint Pius V is eminent, who with great pastoral zeal, at the exhortation of the Council of Trent, renewed the worship of the whole Church, ensuring the publishing of liturgical books amended and “restored according to the norm of the Fathers” and put them into use in the Latin Church.

It is clear that among the liturgical books of the Roman Rite the *Roman Missal* is eminent. It grew in the city of Rome and gradually down through the centuries took on forms which are very similar to those in vigor in recent generations.

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<sup>1</sup> *General Instruction of the Roman Missal, third edition, 2002, n. 397*

“It was this same goal that as time passed the Roman Pontiffs pursued, adapting or establishing liturgical rites and books to new ages and then at the start of the present century undertaking a more ample restoration.”<sup>2</sup> It was in this manner that our Predecessors Clement VIII, Urban VIII, St Pius X<sup>3</sup>, Benedict XV, Pius XII and the Blessed John XXIII acted.

In more recent time, however, the Second Vatican Council expressed the desire that with due respect and reverence for divine worship it be restored and adapted to the needs of our age. Prompted by this desire, our Predecessor the Supreme Pontiff Paul VI in 1970 approved for the Latin Church liturgical books restored and partly renewed, and that throughout the world translated into many vernacular languages, have been welcomed by the Bishops and by the priests and faithful. John Paul II revised the third typical edition of the *Roman Missal*. Thus the Roman Pontiffs have acted so that “this liturgical edifice, so to speak, ...might once again appear splendid in its dignity and harmony.”<sup>4</sup>

However in some regions not a small number of the faithful have been and remain attached with such great love and affection to the previous liturgical forms, which had profoundly imbued their culture and spirit, that the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II, prompted by pastoral concern for these faithful, in 1984 by means of a special Indult *Quattuor abhinc annos*, drawn up by the Congregation for Divine Worship, granted the faculty to use the *Roman Missal* published by John XXIII in 1962; while in 1988 John Paul II once again, by means of the Motu Proprio *Ecclesia Dei*, exhorted the Bishops to make wide and generous use of this faculty in favor of all the faithful requesting it.

Having pondered at length the pressing requests of these faithful to our Predecessor John Paul II, having also heard the Fathers of the Consistory of Cardinals held on 23 March 2006, having pondered all things, invoked the Holy Spirit and placed our confidence in the help of God, by this present Apostolic Letter we DECREE the following.

Art. 1. The *Roman Missal* promulgated by Paul VI is to be regarded as the ordinary expression of the law of prayer (*lex orandi*) of the Catholic Church of Latin Rite, while the *Roman Missal* promulgated by St Pius V and published again by Blessed John XXIII as the extraordinary expression of the law of prayer (*lex orandi*) and on account of its venerable and ancient use let it enjoy due honor. These two expressions of the law of prayer (*lex orandi*) of the Church in no way lead to a division in the law of prayer (*lex orandi*) of the Church, for they are two uses of the one Roman Rite.

Hence it is licit to celebrate the Sacrifice of the Mass in accordance with the typical edition of the *Roman Missal* promulgated by Blessed John XXIII in 1962 and never abrogated, as the extraordinary form of the Liturgy of the Church. The conditions laid

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<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II, Ap. Letter *Vicesimus quintus annus*, 4 December 1988, n. 3: AAS 81 (1989) p. 899.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>4</sup> Pope St Pius X, Motu Proprio *Abhinc duos annos*, 23 October 1913: AAS 5 (1913) 449-450; cf. Pope John Paul II, Ap. Letter *Vicesimus quintus annus*, 4 December 1988, n. 3: AAS 81 (1989) p. 899.

down by the previous documents *Quattuor abhinc annos* and *Ecclesia Dei* for the use of this *Missal* are replaced by what follows:

Art. 2. In Masses celebrated without the people, any priest of Latin rite, whether secular or religious, can use the *Roman Missal* published by Pope Blessed John XXIII in 1962 or the *Roman Missal* promulgated by the Supreme Pontiff Paul VI in 1970, on any day except in the Sacred Triduum. For celebration in accordance with one or the other *Missal*, a priest does not require any permission, neither from the Apostolic See nor his own Ordinary.

Art. 3. If Communities or Institutes of Consecrated Life or Societies of Apostolic Life of either pontifical or diocesan rite desire to have a celebration of Holy Mass in accordance with the edition of the *Roman Missal* promulgated in 1962 in the conventual or “community” celebration in their own oratories, this is allowed. If an individual community or the entire Institute or Society wants to have such celebrations often or habitually or permanently, the matter is to be decided by the Major Superiors according to the norm of law and the particular laws and statutes.

Art. 4. With due observance of law, even Christ’s faithful who spontaneously request it, may be admitted to celebrations of Holy Mass mentioned in art. 2 above.

Art. 5, § 1. In parishes where a group of faithful attached to the previous liturgical tradition exists stably, let the pastor willingly accede to their requests for the celebration of the Holy Mass according to the rite of the *Roman Missal* published in 1962. Let him see to it that the good of these faithful be harmoniously reconciled with ordinary pastoral care of the parish, under the governance of the Bishop according to canon 392, avoiding discord and fostering the unity of the whole Church.

§ 2. Celebration according to the *Missal* of Blessed John XXIII can take place on weekdays, while on Sundays and on feast days there may be one such celebration.

§ 3. Let the pastor permit celebrations in this extraordinary form for faithful or priests who request it, even in particular circumstances such as weddings, funerals or occasional celebrations, for example pilgrimages.

§ 4. Priests using the *Missal* of Blessed John XXIII must be worthy and not impeded by law.

§ 5. In churches, which are neither parochial nor conventual, it is the Rector of the church who grants the above-mentioned permission.

Art. 6. In Masses celebrated with the people according to the *Missal* of Blessed John XXIII, the Readings can be proclaimed even in the vernacular, using editions that have received the *recognitio* of the Apostolic See.

Art. 7. Where some group of lay faithful, mentioned in art. 5§1 does not obtain what it requests from the pastor, it should inform the diocesan Bishop of the fact. The Bishop is earnestly requested to grant their desire. If he cannot provide for this kind of celebration, let the matter be referred to the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei*.

Art. 8. A Bishop who desires to make provision for requests of lay faithful of this kind, but is for various reasons prevented from doing so, may refer the matter to the Pontifical Commission “*Ecclesia Dei*”, which should give him advice and help.

Art. 9, § 1. Likewise a pastor may, all things duly considered, grant permission to use the older ritual in administering the Sacraments of Baptism, Matrimony, Penance and the Anointing of the Sick, as the good of souls may suggest.

§ 2. Ordinaries are granted the faculty to celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation using the former *Roman Pontifical*, as the good of souls may suggest.

§ 3. It is lawful for clerics in holy orders to use even the Roman Breviary promulgated by Blessed John XXIII in 1962.

Art 10. It is lawful for the local Ordinary, if he judges it opportune, to erect a personal parish according to the norm of canon 518 for celebrations according to the older form of the Roman rite or appoint a rector or chaplain, with due observance of the requirements of law.

Art. 11. The Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei*, erected in 1988 by John Paul II,<sup>5</sup> continues to carry out its function. This Commission is to have the form, duties and norm for action that the Roman Pontiff may wish to assign to it.

Art. 12. The same Commission, in addition to the faculties it already enjoys, will exercise the authority of the Holy See by maintaining vigilance over the observance and application of these dispositions.

Whatever is decreed by Us by means of this Motu Proprio, we order to be firm and ratified and to be observed as of 14 September this year, the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, all things to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at Rome, at St Peter’s, on 7 July in the Year of Our Lord 2007, the Third of Our Pontificate.

BENEDICT XVI

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Pope John Paul II, Motu proprio *Ecclesia Dei adflicta*, 2 July 1988, n. 6: AAS 80 (1988) p. 1498.