

Germain Grisez in his *Living a Christian Life* asks: What Is One's Chief Responsibility in Regard to Worship? He answers this question by saying: One should participate devoutly in the Eucharist.

"Reverent participation," he says, "respects the holiness of the Eucharist. While an excessively formal attitude of reverence and awe toward the sacrifice of the Mass and the reception of Communion might reflect and foster inappropriate fear of God and self-depreciation, a casual attitude of relaxed informality during the Eucharist can reflect and foster forgetfulness of God's holiness and a lack of humility before him. Therefore, appropriate behavior is important in order to manifest and foster the reverence due the holy sacrifice and Holy Communion."

In other words, there should be a balance between proper fear of the Lord and proper worship of the Lord. One day we will stand before Him; what will we say about our devotion?

It is unquestionably a fundamental duty of man to direct his whole life and activity toward God. Man does so when he responds freely to the divine being in those postures of the human heart that God expects of his creatures – in a word, when he practices religion, which is simply but sublimely the virtue of justice toward God.

This responsibility is first of all incumbent on us as individuals, each being bound to render homage to God according to our native capacity and the gifts of grace we have received. But the duty also binds the community of the human race, grouped as we are by mutual social ties. Not only man but also mankind is to worship God.

What can be done?

How much longer must the Our Heavenly Father endure the profanation of His temple, either by clergy or laity?

The philosopher Edmond Burke (1729-1797) wrote: "For evil to triumph, good men have to do nothing."

It is easy to simply blame lax priests and bishops for the liturgical mess confronting our Church, but in reality, we, the laity, are equally culpable. We have allowed these aberrations to continue year after year as sheep being led to slaughter and will be held culpable if we do nothing. In June, 1972 Archbishop Fulton J.

Sheen, wrote: "Who is going to save our Church? Not our bishops, not our priests and religious. It is up to you, the people. You have the minds, the eyes, the ears to save the Church. Your mission is to see that your priests act like priests, your bishops act like bishops, and your religious act like religious."

The following are a few suggestions:

1. Pray daily and fast often for a renewal of proper liturgical practice.
2. Have Masses celebrated in atonement for our neglect.
3. Educate yourself by reading Church documents on the Liturgy.
4. Be vocal in your appreciation toward faithful priests and bishops who celebrate Mass properly and reverently.
5. Speak out in support of proper liturgy. You may be pleasantly surprised to find that there are many others who share your concern.
6. Do not be afraid to confront improper practice, but do so respectfully.
7. Use the chain of command. If your priest is negligent and does not respond to your entreaties, document everything and write to your bishop, respectfully asking him to provide fraternal correction.
8. Finally, if your bishop does not respond to your satisfaction, write to: The Prefect of the Congregation of Divine Worship & Discipline of the Sacraments, Piazza Pio XII 10 00193 Rome, VATICAN CITY

It falls to the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments to maintain the liturgical life of the Church and foster its growth, and to assure orthodoxy with Rome.

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Pamphlet 303

Liturgical Improprieties

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The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes the Mass as the "source and summit of Christian life." As such, each and every part of the Mass has been specifically outlined by the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments in Rome, and the U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops the NCCB. It is my opinion that we, as laity, should be able to go anywhere in the country, or the world, and find the Mass of the Roman Rite celebrated precisely in accordance with these directives. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

We are living in a time when the majesty of the Mass is not always properly understood, much less appreciated by the laity, and at times even by some of our priests. It is not uncommon to find a lack of respect for the sanctity of God's house and most importantly for His Eucharistic Presence. I do not say that this is done deliberately; most often, it is done out of ignorance. There is much confusion among us as to how the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is to be celebrated. We as Catholics have an obligation to learn our part in the Eucharistic celebration not only in order to heighten our own participation, but even more importantly, to show proper respect and worship to Our Father in heaven.

The Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, has expressed his concern for these matters during his entire pontificate. In his encyclical *Inaestimabile Donum*, his *Instruction Concerning Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery*, issued on April 17, 1980, he wrote in the foreword:

"This Sacred Congregation notes with great joy the many positive results of the liturgical reform: a more active and conscious participation by the faithful in the liturgical mysteries, doctrinal and catechetical enrichment through the use of the vernacular, and the wealth of readings from the Bible, a growth in the community sense of liturgical life, and successful efforts to close the gap between life and worship, between Liturgical piety and personal piety, and between Liturgy and popular piety.

Then he went on to say:

“But these encouraging and positive aspects cannot suppress concern at the varied and frequent abuses being reported from different parts of the Catholic world: the confusion of roles, especially regarding the priestly ministry and the role of the laity (indiscriminate shared recitation of the Eucharistic Prayer, homilies given by lay people, lay people distributing Communion while the priests refrain from doing so); an increasing loss of the sense of the sacred (abandonment of liturgical vestments, the Eucharist celebrated outside church without real need, lack of reverence and respect for the Blessed Sacrament, etc.); misunderstanding of the ecclesial character of the Liturgy (the use of private texts, the proliferation of unapproved Eucharistic Prayers, the manipulation of the liturgical texts for social and political ends). In these cases we are face to face with a real falsification of the Catholic Liturgy:

The Holy Father continues with a quote from St. Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae*, Part 2 of the 2nd part, Question 93, Answer 1:

“One who offers worship to God on the Church’s behalf in a way contrary to that which is laid down by the Church with God-given authority and which is customary in the Church is guilty of falsification.

“None of these things can bring good results. The consequences are – and cannot fail to be – the impairing of the unity of Faith and worship in the Church, doctrinal uncertainty, scandal and bewilderment among the People of God, and the near inevitability of violent reactions.

“The faithful have a right to true Liturgy, which means the Liturgy desired and laid down by the Church, which has in fact indicated where adaptations may be made as called for by pastoral requirements in different places or by different groups of people. Undue experimentation, changes and creativity bewilder the faithful.”

Noted moral theologian, Germain Grisez in his three-volume work entitled *Living a Christian Life*, comments on this issue of falsification raised by St. Thomas Aquinas:

“To falsify Catholic worship can be a grave matter. Liturgical worship is the Church’s act; Jesus and his members share in it. Since they act

not simply as private individuals, but share in the Church’s act, all who play a role in the liturgy act in an official capacity. Thus, anyone who makes unauthorized changes in the liturgy or encourages others to make them falsely offers as the Church’s what in reality is only personal. Insofar as such falsification modifies authentic Catholic worship, it is a sort of superstition, for even if the unauthorized change is meant to contribute to genuine worship, the choice of falsification as a means is incompatible with the reverence essential to true worship”.

The Second Vatican Council’s *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Chapter 22, paragraph 3, clearly states:

“No person, even if he be a priest, may add, remove or change anything in the Liturgy on his own authority.”

These innovative practices have continued to plague the church worldwide since Vatican Council II, in spite of the Holy Father’s efforts. More recently, in a December 1998 statement to the Australian bishops, the Holy Father, referring to this section in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* stated:

“A weakness in parish liturgical celebrations...is the tendency on the part of some priests and parishes to make their own changes to liturgical texts and structures, whether by omissions, by additions or by substitutions, occasionally even in central texts such as the Eucharistic Prayer. Practices foreign to the tradition of the Roman Rite are not to be introduced on the private initiative of priests, who are ministers and servants, rather than masters of the sacred Rites”.

The Ordination Rite

As part of the Ordination Rite, the newly ordained priests recite the Apostle’s Creed, thus publicly professing the faith, which they will preach to the world.

The newly ordained also recite a Promise of Obedience. This promise of obedience is not a vow like the vow of obedience made by religious, but it imposes upon the priest the solemn obligation to administer his office in faithful obedience to his ecclesiastical superiors. Without obedience the Church could not carry

on her work. And after all, how fitting it is that the priest, who is “another Christ,” should distinguish himself and merit the blessing of God for his work by the practice of that virtue which may be called the characteristic virtue of our Savior Jesus Christ, who “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8).

Inherent in this Promise of Obedience is that the priest will do and teach what the Church ordained him to do and teach. If a priest willingly and knowingly celebrates Mass in a manner contrary to the specifics mandated by the Church, he is in violation of his oath before God and commits sacrilege, *i.e.* mortal sin.

Sacrilege is a sin against the First Commandment. Jesuit Father, John Hardon, in his *Catholic Catechism*, defines the term sacrilege as a sin against the first commandment:

“The term “sacrilege” is commonly used to describe any profanation of what is sacred, for example, perjury or blasphemy. But strictly speaking, a sacrilege is the violation or contemptuous treatment of a person, place, or thing publicly dedicated to the worship or service of God. Thus a sacrilege... is called real when committed against a sacred object, for example, treating the Blessed Sacrament irreverently or administering or receiving the Eucharist in a state of mortal sin. One of the clearest allusions to such irreverent treatment of the Eucharist occurs in St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 11, verses 29 & 30, when he warned that ‘a person who eats and drinks without recognizing the body (of the Lord) is eating and drinking his own condemnation. In fact, that is why many of you are weak and ill and some of you have died.’ Paul considered the sickness and death of some Corinthians to have been a punishment for irreverence to ‘the body and blood of the Lord.’”

What of our priests, and laity who celebrate Mass properly, but in a casual or even slovenly manner? This too is sinful, though not necessarily mortal. Every Mass should be celebrated and entered into, by priest and laity alike, as though it is our last. What about those in higher authority who sanction or ignore these irregularities; will they not also be held culpable by God?