

Do *This* In Memory Of Me

The General Instruction of The Roman Missal (GIRM) begins with a beautiful introduction consisting of fifteen sections divided into three parts. The three parts are *Testimony of An Unaltered Faith, Uninterrupted Tradition* and finally, *Accommodation to New Conditions*. The purpose of these three sections is to set forth a solid theological understanding of the Mass, how that understanding is rooted in the Tradition of the Church, and then, in the final analysis, how accommodations may be made in the present age while remaining always faithful to the command of Jesus Christ to do *This* in memory of Him.

We begin our consideration of the *GIRM* just as the Church does, by clarifying what the *This* is that Christ commanded His Church to do. In the Gospel according to Saint Luke we are told that Christ sent Peter and John into the city to make the necessary preparations for the celebration of the Passover in a room that had been arranged and prepared according to His instructions (22:7-13). Reflecting on this passage of the Sacred Scriptures, the Church has always understood the command to make the necessary preparations to apply to herself with regards to the times, places, texts and all things related to the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice (*GIRM #1*).

Keeping in mind the command of the Lord to do *This*, and faithful to an unbroken Tradition, the Church exercised her authority to issue norms for the celebration of the Mass in the form of the *General Instruction*, first decreed in 1970 and then revised to correspond with the publication of the *Third Typical Edition* of the *Roman Missal* that went into use on the First Sunday of Advent in 2011. The introduction to the *GIRM* also makes clear that these revised norms are *in keeping with the will* of the *Second Vatican Council (#1)*.

After affirming the authority of the Church to establish and revise the norms that govern the celebration of the Mass, the *GIRM* unapologetically lays down the theology that is represented in the *Roman Missal*¹:

So, in the new Missal the rule of prayer (lex orandi) of the Church corresponds to her perennial rule of faith (lex credendi), by which we are truly taught that the sacrifice of his Cross and its sacramental renewal in the Mass, which Christ the Lord instituted at the Last Supper and commanded his Apostles to do in his memory, are one and the same, differing only in the manner of their offering; and as a result, that the Mass is at one and the same time a sacrifice of praise, thanksgiving, propitiation, and satisfaction. (#2)

What the Church is teaching us is that the *rule of prayer*, which are the norms contained in the *GIRM*, is intended to govern and preserve the truth that has been revealed to us by Jesus Christ with regards to His institution and our celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. What is being affirmed is that once you learn to break the rules or alter the norms, then you do violence to the Mass, and its truth is in a sense and to a certain degree changed. To put this in more practical

¹ The *Roman Missal* is the large red book used by the priest that contains all of the instructions, rubrics and the texts to be used for the celebration of the Mass. A *missal* is a *book of the Mass* derived from the Latin *Missa* for *Mass*, and it is *Roman* because it is the norm of celebration in the Latin Rite Church.

language, our experience of the Mass forms us in our understanding of what the Mass is. (This is not to suggest that “our experience” is the norm by which we measure the Mass, it is only being suggested that keeping or breaking the rules changes our understanding of it.) In other words, rules matter.

Bearing in mind that the rule of prayer has everything to do with the rule of faith the Church reminds her priests that *he (the priest) is the servant of the Sacred Liturgy and that he himself is not permitted, on his own initiative, to add, to remove, or to change anything in the celebration of the Mass (GIRM #24 quoting the Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council paragraph 22).*

What is at stake, in addition to the preservation of the faith and guarding the truth about the nature of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, is the participation of the faithful in Mass to which they have a right. It is a matter of justice and justice touches on rights and obligations.

In justice we owe God our worship, which has to do with the virtue of religion, but there is also a dimension of justice in which the faithful, having been baptized, have a right to participate in the Eucharistic Sacrifice instituted by Christ in which the mysteries of their redemption are represented and the graces for holiness of life are made available. To put it simply and logically, we are obliged to worship God with the Eucharistic Sacrifice instituted by His Son, and priests are obliged to obey the norms established by the Church regarding the celebration to which the people have a right. Priest must do *This*.

In the next installment of this catechesis on the *GIRM* we will look at the idea of conscious, active and full participation of the lay faithful in the celebration of the Mass.