

Reflection on the Survey Responses

II. On Vatican II, and the Use of Latin

Dear Parishioners,

Christ is the Way!

Following up on the statistical analysis and overview of the Respect and Reverence Survey shared with you last weekend, we now go over the respondents' remarks. Even though a small percentage of parishioners participated in the survey, the remarks are still varied. They are being shared with you so that we can hear and listen to each other. It is good to hear and listen to individual voices. Each voice represents a value that makes us hold dearly in our hearts the Holy Mass.

To make the reflection easier to follow, the remarks are grouped under common headings. In this reflection, I gathered the remarks that mention Vatican II, the use of Latin and Gregorian Chant. To provide clarification on some of the remarks, we refer to Vatican II's Constitution on the Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*). If you wish to read the document, know that it is accessible online.

I thank the respondents for their comments. May the catechesis, provided when needed, be helpful.

Yours in Christ,
Father Edison

Remarks in the Survey.

"I am concerned that we as church do not move backward. With Vatican II, there were expected changes that would benefit Catholics."

"The changes in the Advent season with liturgical music going to more Gregorian Chant and the use of Latin greatly increases my sense of reverence. The increase in traditional elements has helped me focus and not be distracted."

"Thankfully the reforms of Vatican II occurred as I was born. The Catholic Church experienced the negative impact of saying Mass in a language not spoken by its members for centuries. We should not go backwards."

"It (the Latin Mass) has helped me connect to the patrimony of the Church which in turn increases my respect for the Liturgy regardless of form."

"Again, I would rather speak the English language during Mass. When Mass is in Latin, I feel left out."

"Work Gregorian Chant into the music lineup. The Latin has been very good."

"This initiative appears to be another example of reducing the engagement of the majority of parishioners at Mass. I believe frequent singing songs in Latin ... using chants rather than songs, and the priest facing

away from the people are further examples of this unfortunate shift."

"There also seems to be more respect with the chanted portions of the Mass."

On Vatican II.

As some responses indicated, Vatican II appears to be a reference point, if not a turning point, to many with regards to changes that occurred in Church, including the liturgy. To some, anything before Vatican II seems backward.

Keeping in mind this perception about Vatican II and since our survey

focused on the Holy Mass, it will be helpful to refer to Vatican II and its Constitution on the Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*). So, we must ask, *"What is the constitution's vision concerning the relationship between what happened before and after Vatican II?"*

Let us read *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 4: *"Lastly, in faithful obedience to tradition, the sacred Council declares that holy Mother Church holds all lawfully acknowledged rites to be of equal right and dignity; that she wishes to preserve them in the future and to foster them in every way. The Council also desires that, where necessary, the rites be revised carefully in the light of sound tradition, and that they be given new vigor to meet the circumstances and needs of modern times."*

And Jesus replied, "Then every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old."

- Matthew 13:52, NAB

This paragraph is taken from the Introduction of the Constitution. It is there to help set the tone on how to interpret and understand the document. It expresses the importance both of preserving tradition and of recognizing new circumstances and needs. It also points out the task of the Church to preserve and to build on her sacred heritage according to the soundness of the Christian doctrine. The soundness of doctrine is our source of strength as we, the Church, deal with new realities. The Church accepts new realities as long as they pass through the filter of sound doctrine. As Church, we cannot abandon our past nor can we be oblivious to our present situation.

With the Holy Spirit to guide our discernment, it is honest and good for us to ask follow up questions: “*What of the past is worth keeping?*” “*What changes in history have helped develop, perhaps even perfect our understanding of the Christian faith?*” “*What changes do not merit preservation?*” “*How rigorous are we in using sound doctrine to determine whether a certain change is good or bad?*”

On the Use of Latin at Mass.

Let us read from Sacrosanctum Concilium, 36.1: “*Particular law remaining in force, the use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rites.*”

And from Sacrosanctum Concilium, 54: “*In Masses which are celebrated with the people, a suitable place may be allotted to their mother tongue. This is to apply in the first place to the readings and “the common prayer,” but also, as local conditions may warrant, to those parts which pertain to the people, according to the norm laid down in Art. 36 of this Constitution.*

Nevertheless, steps should be taken so that the faithful may also be able to say or to sing together in Latin those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them.

And wherever a more extended use of the mother tongue within the Mass appears desirable, the regulation laid down in Art. 40 of this Constitution is to be observed.”

At Saint Patrick’s, we strive to be attentive to our conscious participation in the Liturgy, before and during

COVID. For this reason, when we started introducing Latin hymns at Mass, we began with the Mass parts that people are already familiar with, like the Holy, Holy, Holy (*Sanctus*), and the Lamb of God (*Agnus Dei*). Please refer to the boxed text to learn more about the vision of the US bishops with regards to singing certain Mass parts in Latin.

Each worshipping community in the United States, including all age groups and all ethnic groups, should, at a minimum, learn *Kyrie XVI (Lord, have mercy)*, *Sanctus XVIII (Holy, Holy, Holy)*, and *Agnus Dei XVIII (Lamb of God)*, all of which are typically included in congregational worship aids. More difficult chants, such as *Gloria VIII (Glory to God)* and settings of the *Credo (Creed)* and *Pater Noster (The Lord’s Prayer)*, might be learned after the easier chants have been mastered.

- USCCB, Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship, 75.

And when we introduced Latin hymns like *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, it was accompanied by translation and was sung through Advent and Christmas to give people ample time to be familiar with the hymn. With *Panis Angelicus*, not only was it accompanied by translation, the choir alternated singing it in English and Latin.

What we learn from the Constitution itself is that while Vatican II opened the liturgy to the vernacular languages, it did not close her doors to Latin. In the 3rd century, when Latin replaced Greek as the common language, Latin was used in the liturgy. Later, with the rise of national languages in Europe,

the Church was cautious so as not to lose the universal character of the Mass because of the national languages. With Vatican II, it becomes evident that the Church has identified a common ground where both the vernacular is acknowledged and some Latin is preserved. Now, as we reintroduce some Latin at Mass, Latin may and should sound unfamiliar. With the provided translations and some patience, the hymns in Latin can be understood. It may not be a bad use of time to read and re-read the texts as though one prays in preparation for Sunday Mass. Some of our young families are teaching their children Latin. As seen in the responses, some young people welcome it and some of our older parishioners find it familiar.

In our next reflection, we will look into the section of the Constitution that pertains to the use of Gregorian Chant.

Thank you, and God bless you.

Father Edison