



**Boston Catholic Journal**



NIHIL NISI JESUM

DEDICATED TO MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

*“Salus animarum Suprema Lex esto — The Salvation of Souls is the Supreme Law in the Church” (Canon Law 1752)*

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## **Mass Entertainment**



*“THIS IS MY BODY”*

**“a Clown Mass”**

**Musings on Opposition to Latin in the Mass**

**and a Return to the Tridentine Mass in the Catholic Church**

“I can’t fight back the tears. This is the saddest moment in my life as a man, priest and bishop,” Luca Brandolini, a member of the liturgy commission of the Italian bishops' conference, told Rome daily *La Repubblica* in an interview on Sunday. “It’s a day of mourning, not just for me but for the many people who worked for the Second Vatican Council. A reform for which many people worked, with great sacrifice and only inspired by the desire to renew the Church, has now been cancelled.” — *Bishop Luca Brandolini* (principal architect of the *Novus Ordo Missae*, or the Vernacular Mass)

## Why the vernacular has failed miserably at Mass

### Indeed ...

**Poor Bishop Brandolini**, fretting that *his* work — which decimated the Church — may be imperiled by the clamoring of the Faithful for a return of Latin to the liturgy ... even the Tridentine Rite itself! His failed “experiment” — that profoundly touched ... and detrimentally changed ... the lives of one billion people, may, he apparently fears,

and to the point of tears, become along with himself, a footnote in Church history.

And not a very proud one at that.

My question to the tearful, and *deeply personally* injured bishop is this: how can he square the fact that the abandonment of the Latin Mass and Divine Office following the “slash and burn” liturgical methodology following Vatican II — “merely and strangely coincided” with the decimation of Religious Orders, the emptying of monasteries and seminaries, the huge loss of friars, monks, and nuns, the unparalleled drop in vocations to the priesthood and religious life, the precipitous drop in Mass attendance and the overtly disaffected teaching of so many, many theologians disobedient both to their own *Mandatum* and to the Holy See? Answer me this, my good bishop, ***obviously in such deep communion, in such exemplary solidarity, with the Supreme Pontiff!***

Even to the most doctrinaire and zealous “reformer”, to overlook this, to turn a blind eye to it, is an egregious unwillingness to come to terms with the truth, the facts, and yes, the figures, that undeniably indicate the health of the Church and Her faithfulness to God. Are we really to believe that it just a coincidence that this tremendous hemorrhage occurred precisely at the time of profound changes that broke a thousand year continuity and tradition?

Perhaps there are those who can — but I cannot — simply dismiss the fact that the Religious Orders that threw away their charisms with their habits and went from living in community in monasteries and convents to living in their own apartments — are the very orders that now have the fewest and the oldest members — while the thriving orders being filled by the youngest vocations — beyond capacity and resources in many instances — are the very ones that have picked up the discarded habits, renewed the renounced charisms, and reclaimed the traditions that the "progressive" orders shed wholesale 40 years ago.

A coincidence? Possibly elsewhere, but not on the planet Earth.

Consider the venerable Sisters of St. Joseph, or the School Sisters of Notre Dame — once incredibly large teaching orders. They are now few, and fewer, ... old, and older. Vocations simply are not forthcoming. Their average age well exceeds 60.

On the other hand, the relatively few who *remained* after the terrible hemorrhage following *the tearing down of the walls* ... not the much vaunted "*flinging open of the windows*" ... of the Church following the "renewal" of Vatican II, largely became social workers committed much more to saving "social structures" and fostering feminist "empowerment" — than saving "immortal souls". They are politically astute and deeply activist, some even having held political office. Nearly all of them appear

to be strongly and visibly aligned with a clearly distinguishable body politic — called the Democratic Party (think Fr./Congressman Drinan, 10 years and four terms in Congress, among others).

## **From the “Pie in the Sky” to a “Slice of the Pie”**

They seek our social and political franchise ... but not our souls. Odd. They work to rebuild the City of Man, having effectively emigrated from the City of God — from “the pie in the sky” to the “slice of the pie”. I do not think that the founders of their various orders envisioned such a mutation.

The problem for these “progressive” orders is that they simply have too much competition: there are already countless secular social workers, political activists, organizations and agencies that do exactly what they do. The prevailing charism could be summarized rather succinctly: Why look for a “Pie in the sky”, when you can have a “Piece of the pie?” But the most troubling question — given this defection from the most fundamental nature of a religious vocation itself, a vocation that cannot be coherently understood apart from the primacy of the notion of *redemption* and a *Redeemer*, is this: who is looking to the *souls* of men and women in the meanwhile as such Religious increasingly pursue *secular* ends that are the proper province of the

laity? Presumably such dimensions of our humanity as the immortal soul are still viable concepts ... even realities.

On the other hand, a brief look at religious orders such as the Missionaries of Charity (Mother Teresa's order), and the Legionaries of Christ, to name just two: reveal orders brimming with vocations and almost all of them young. They leave politics to the politicians, activism to the activists, and social work to the social workers (can anyone question the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta and elsewhere with anything less than absolute devotion to the poor ... in body and *soul*?). In other words, they recognize and respect the distinct vocation of the Catholic laity to be the leaven of Christ in the City of Man. Daily their numbers increase —while daily the numbers of the older “politically enlightened and socially progressive” orders diminish. Could Brandolini, and co-architect Archbishop Bugnini have been wrong? Can a mistake have been made?

**The Mass** — as we now know it, and will continue to know it for the foreseeable future — were it celebrated with the beauty and dignity with which it *could* be ... and rarely is ... celebrated — could in fact be in *any* language: it is still the Mass, the re-enactment of Christ's Sacrifice on Calvary. But too often — much, much too often — the Sacrifice is obscured by mindless and meaningless innovations geared to making it “entertaining”. 40 years into the “experiment and things look bleaker than ever. The

priest still leaves the Sanctuary and paces the aisles during his homily in an attempt to emulate talk show hosts or “Reality TV”, ever ready with a joke, and that failing, any anecdote to stimulate laughter from his “audience”. The congregation fidgets and laughs obligingly to conceal their embarrassment and his ineptitude. The wink of the eye (“what a rogue! You devil, you ...”) is supposed to “connect” him with everyone “really in the know”. After all, he’s “just one the guys”. That’s why he leaves the Sanctuary: to “connect” himself with the people, instead of remaining in the Sanctuary connecting people to God. Did I ever tell you of the the Deacon in my parish who used a toilet plunger as a “scepter” during the Feast of Christ the King? It is true.

Mass became Mass Entertainment and a mass “communal meal” where the pews emptied entirely with no sinner in sight left behind in the pews. No one knows of sin because no one any longer speaks of sin — especially “mortal sin” — *eo ipso* there are no sinners in the Church. Since Vatican II, all, apparently, have attained to impeccability and are worthy of the Lamb and all — *and I mean all* — “approach the table” (as they now say, once known as *the Altar* in those dark pre-Conciliar days when the Mass was a Sacrifice, and not entertainment).

And, of course, every entertainer, every MC, has his musicians. If the Mass fails as entertainment it can always fall back on the music — but the choir-as-music fails even more miserably, even more conspicuously were it possible, than the priest as

entertainer. And it *is* possible: there is absolutely no public venue that would accept what is sung, tolerated really, at Catholic Masses and hope to break even at the end of the night. But at the end of Mass we are encouraged to actually applaud the cacophony that has grated on us for the past 45 minutes.

Applause is the also the most appropriate response to “entertainment”.

As you applaud, the “musical *entertainers*” accordingly bow in gratitude for your appreciation of their *performance*.

I myself do not find Christ's Sacrifice on Calvary “entertaining”. Nor do I approach it *expecting* to entertained by it, as the people around Christ at the time of His Crucifixion — those who milled around at the foot of the Cross — did.

**So, ask yourself this, for it is absolutely the most fundamental feature of the Mass — apart from which there is no Mass:**

If you were transported back 2000 years and stood present at the Crucifixion of Christ on Calvary ..., would you be:



- Eager to listen to the display of virtuosity of your church pianist ( ... given that organs are now seldom used)?
- Longing for the strumming of acoustical or electric guitars?
- Tapping your foot to the beat of drums and the clashing of cymbals?
- “Feeling warm and fuzzy”?
- Telling jokes to those who sat around the foot of the Cross?
- Sharing humorous anecdotes with anyone who would listen?
- Wish to demonstrate to all around you how “clever” and “contemporary” you are?
- Strive to be the focus of attention ... competing with Christ on the Cross?

These are not facetious questions.

If you would act in any way differently than you would if you stood with your waking eyes before Christ being Crucified — then you do not understand the Mass. It is the re-enactment of Calvary. It is not a social, a communal meal, the opportunity to display your musical prowess or your ability to amuse and entertain people — or to be amused and entertained. We have television for that. Movies. Video. The Internet.

## **Mass is absolutely unique**

One does not watch a video to worship God. One goes to experiment with entertainment and to be entertained.

One does not go to Mass to experiment with entertainment and to be entertained. One goes to Mass to worship God.

The two are not synonymous — except, sadly, in the Catholic Church.

The vernacular, it turns out, has failed miserably in “engaging” the people with God (its putative intent)— but it *has* succeeded eminently in engaging people with each other ... which they can equally do in countless other venues. If this is so, however, the logical question then is, “well, why go to Mass at all?” The answer is in the U.S. Census: most don't any longer (note the qualifier “any longer”) ...

When the Mass has to “compete” with other forms of entertainment — it loses. And it loses badly. Nearly anyone else is better at entertainment than a priest and a miserable choir ... hands down.

If the experiment with the vernacular has failed (and it is vital that we remember that

it was supposed to be a *limited experiment, with Latin remaining intact as the language of worship*) and has failed with a staggering and perhaps irrecoverable loss to the Church — then a return to what worked in the past cannot possibly fare worse — and given a successful track record of *1500 years with what worked* before it was discarded, it is, I think, a pretty good bet.

The problem is that we are too arrogant to admit that we were wrong, that what we were allowed to *experiment with*, and had subsequently set in stone, did not work. No matter what the facts, what the figures, what the loss — we refuse to admit our mistake.

The word for that is **pride**. The deadliest sin of all. And the casualties, as we have found over the past 40 years, have been nothing less than staggering ...

Yes?

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