

+JMJ+

Update on the Traditional Latin Mass in the Diocese of Jefferson City

from Rev. Dylan Schrader

May 29, 2025

The Ascension of the Lord, universal calendar

The Memorial of St. Paul VI, local calendar

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I have the sad duty of bringing you the news that the celebration of Mass using the Missal of 1962 (the traditional Latin Mass) will end here in Westphalia at the end of June.

I have been blessed to celebrate Mass in this form weekly for about the past seven years. St. Joseph in Westphalia has hosted this celebration for the Diocese of Jefferson City since my appointment as pastor here three years ago.

Please bear with me. There is no statement from Bishop McKnight, now Archbishop of Kansas City in Kansas, or from our diocese, so these are my own words. I decided to write this out both so that I do not leave anything out and because I find this emotionally difficult to get through.

Some History

As you know, there have been many liturgical reforms over the course of the past century. The most drastic changes in the Latin Church occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1969, the new Roman Missal was promulgated and went into widespread use. There were many other changes in conjunction with this, and there were sadly often abuses that were not at all what the Church was asking for.

Recognizing that members of the faithful remained attached to traditional forms of worship, Pope John Paul II instructed bishops to be “generous” in allowing for the traditional Latin Mass in their dioceses.¹ He spoke of the need to show respect everywhere “for the feelings of all those who are attached to the Latin liturgical tradition.”²

In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI issued *Summorum Pontificum* along with an accompanying letter. In this letter, Pope Benedict pointed out that the Missal of 1962 was “never juridically abrogated and, consequently, in principle, was always permitted.”³ He affirmed that: “There is no contradiction between the two editions of the Roman Missal. In the history of the liturgy there is growth and progress, but no rupture. What earlier generations held as sacred, remains sacred and great for us too, and it cannot be all of a sudden entirely forbidden or even considered harmful. It behooves all of us to preserve the riches which have developed in the Church’s faith and prayer, and to give them their proper place.”

1 *Ecclesia Dei adflicta* (1988); cf. *Quattuor abhinc annos* (1984).

2 *Ecclesia Dei adflicta* (1988).

3 *Letter to the Bishops that Accompanies the Apostolic Letter motu proprio data Summorum Pontificum* (2007).

In a later interview, Pope Benedict repeated this principle. When asked whether *Summorum Pontificum* was primarily meant as a concession to the Society of St. Pius X, he replied: “That is just absolutely false! It was important for me that the Church is one with herself inwardly, with her own past; that what was previously holy to her is not somehow wrong now. The rite must develop. In that sense reform is appropriate. But the continuity must not be ruptured.”⁴

Indeed, for many years prior to his election as pope, Joseph Ratzinger had spoken and written about the identity crisis the Church was experiencing and the need for healing. Given the primacy of worship in the Church’s life, especially the Mass, he recognized that healing requires the recovery of traditional liturgical forms. Like John Paul II, Benedict also called for generosity in making these forms available for the faithful.⁵

In a nutshell, I would summarize Pope Benedict’s vision as it relates to the Roman Missal and the Second Vatican Council in this way: The Church’s faith after Vatican II must be essentially the same as it was before Vatican II. Vatican II did not change what we fundamentally believe as Catholics. Therefore, the way we prayed before Vatican II remains a good and important expression of what we believe today. We are not suddenly a different religion from our ancestors, and so what was sacred for them should be sacred for us.

Personally, I am convinced that Pope Benedict’s vision is fundamentally correct. I also think that the healing the Church needs so much will not come quickly. It will require generations, and it will require the recovery of our tradition so that the riches of our liturgical, devotional, and theological heritage again become familiar to people. That is why I also think it is important that the traditional liturgy be readily available to people.

It was because of this that from the time I was in the seminary—actually before *Summorum Pontificum*—I studied the liturgical reform from primary sources very carefully and learned how to serve and eventually how to celebrate the traditional Latin Mass. Following *Summorum Pontificum*, we had regular celebrations of the traditional Latin Mass in the seminary and were encouraged to learn it so that we could serve the faithful as Pope Benedict had asked.

My second Mass as a priest, Monday in the Octave of Pentecost of 2010, was in the traditional form, and in my early years as a priest I took many opportunities to offer the traditional Latin Mass around the diocese. However, it was not until about seven years ago that, under Bishop McKnight’s direction, our diocese was able successfully to establish a stable Sunday celebration of the TLM.

That effort required sacrifices by many people: altar boys had to be trained; booklets had to be made; chants had to be learned; and so forth. I built the temporary altar rail that we used at Saint Brendan’s in my garage! Many of you have consistently driven great distances and have given of yourselves to support this. I want to express my heartfelt gratitude. The schola. Our devoted altar boys. The newsletter. The booklets. The devotions. Father Pat Dowling, who has been such a big help with confessions. The potluck lunches. There are so many good things that have been built up over the years.

And I am well aware of my own shortcomings, or at least I’m aware of some of them. To be totally honest, it has sometimes been a struggle trying to run my parishes, my school, carry out my jobs for the

4 Benedict XVI with Peter Seewald, *Last Testament: In His Own Words* (Continuum, 2016), 201–202.

5 Cf. also the instruction *Universae Ecclesiae* (2011), no. 8.

diocese, and then to celebrate the TLM on top of it. It was sometimes hard to deal with the complaints and resistance from people who were against the TLM or the difficulties within the TLM community itself. I often found myself low on energy and time trying to keep everything going. I never wanted and still do not want the TLM to be dependent on me personally. I would rather that it be readily available and considered a normal part of parish life.

In the midst of our efforts in this diocese, in 2021 Pope Francis issued *Traditionis custodes*, which radically changed the landscape. One of the most impactful restrictions imposed by *Traditionis custodes* is the prohibition on using parish churches for the celebration of the older form.⁶ Bishop McKnight twice requested and received a dispensation on our behalf, which has allowed us to continue here with the approval of the Holy See. It is because that dispensation expires at the end of June and because it has not been renewed that the bishop directed me to end the celebrations here.

Over the past few years, I have advocated and attempted to arrange for some way for the traditional Latin Mass to remain available for the people of our diocese in the long term. Some of you participated in synodal listening sessions and in the Shaping Our Future Together process. I personally spoke before all the priests of the diocese and before the presbyteral council several times, in addition to written proposals and meetings with the bishop and diocesan leadership. There were times where we seemed to have a clear plan and then due to circumstances it did not work out.

The Latest Development

Here is the latest development: With the traditional Latin Mass ending here in Westphalia, there is a possibility that it will start up again at a different location with a different priest. I am hopeful for this. However, that priest's availability is still being worked out, and we will probably not know until the fall. Again, I am hopeful but I cannot make any 100% guarantees.

A further difficulty is that we are also now without a bishop. Soon the college of consultors of our diocese will elect a diocesan administrator to manage things temporarily until we receive a new bishop. I don't know who that will be, but that is one of the people I will be working with on this situation.

Obedience

I would like to say a few words about obedience. Some will naturally wonder: "Father, do you really have to follow the bishop's directive on this?" The answer is yes. Believe me, I know there are voices out there who disagree. I have studied their arguments, but I do not find them convincing.

The first thing I would like to clear up is that the obedience a priest owes his superiors is not just a matter of bad consequences. We must obey not primarily because of what can happen to us if we don't. It is true that we can be punished in many ways for failing to carry out orders—but that is not the primary concern. After all, we should always be willing to suffer for doing the right thing. And that, in fact, is the primary concern when it comes to priestly obedience—doing the right thing. Obedience is a matter of moral obligation. We must bend our will to the will of our superiors in certain matters. My decision to obey our former bishop's directive is a choice that I make because I am personally convinced that I must do so in conscience.

⁶ *Traditionis custodes* (2021), art. 3, § 2.

Obedience does not mean liking a decision or agreeing that it's the best possible one. It means simply choosing to carry out that decision as an obligation. Now, a superior cannot obligate his subjects to do what is immoral, but he can bind them to do things that they don't like or that they disagree with as a matter of prudential judgment. He can bind them to do what is less good than something else would have been.

Our former bishop's directive to me—which reflects his own attempt to implement the will of Pope Francis—is a prohibition on celebrating Mass in a particular time and place using a particular liturgical book. The Church has always had the authority to restrict priests in obedience in such matters. For instance, as a priest of the Latin Church, I may not celebrate the divine liturgies of the Eastern Catholic Churches without special permission. On Good Friday, it is forbidden to celebrate the Mass at all. Such restrictions are within the scope of the Church's authority over her priests.

Further, the directive not to use a specific liturgical book at a particular time and place is not equivalent to being forbidden from celebrating Mass altogether. Mass celebrated using the new Roman Missal is certainly valid and legitimate. It is valid because the Eucharist is consecrated and the Eucharistic sacrifice re-presented. It is legitimate because it is a rite promulgated by the Apostolic See. The new Roman Missal does not contain anything that contradicts Catholic teaching.

The directive for me to use the new Missal but not the older Missal is, therefore, one that I must obey. I am not being directed to do something immoral but—at least in this time and place—to forgo something good.

At the heart of the question of obedience is a moral obligation rooted in a promise that is itself grounded in Catholic ecclesiology. As Catholics, we treasure our communion with the bishops, who are successors of the apostles. I bear in mind the words of St. Ignatius of Antioch, “Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop.”⁷

The promise to maintain communion is not only made at ordination. I have made it each time I have been installed as pastor of a parish. My people deserve a priest who keeps his promises. I would be doing a disservice to you if I were to “set up shop on my own.” That is not the Catholic way.

Acknowledgment

At the same time, I grieve the loss—at least for the time being—of something that I have experienced as very good. And I am deeply saddened by the pain that this decision causes.

You are not crazy or divisive or bad for liking or being interested in traditional worship. You are not wrong for wanting to nourish and protect your children's faith in this harsh world.

You are here *because* you want to maintain full communion with the Catholic Church. I apologize for the hurt that goes along with that, and I would like to apologize for all insensitivity or unfair treatment from myself or from other members of the clergy.

7 Letter to the Smyrnaeans, chap. 8.

Next Steps

- The last celebration of the traditional Latin Mass in Westphalia will be Sunday, June 29th.
- Because of an unrelated, previously scheduled absence and lack of coverage, there will not be a Latin Mass here on June 15th.
- Following the blessing of religious articles on June 1st, I will head down to the cafeteria to be available for questions and discussion.
- It is my hope that the TLM will become available again on some basis, but that will not be known for sure until the fall.
- As far as bridging the gap between June 29th and the fall, there is nothing concrete at this time. I would like to hear from you, and I will also be in touch with our diocesan administrator when he is elected.

Conclusion

I hope that our time here at Westphalia will be something we can look back on as a chapter in a much longer story. I hope that the children who are growing up today or perhaps their children will face fewer challenges within the Church. They will undoubtedly have enough coming at them from the world. One day, perhaps, in God's providence we will look back and recognize that what we were doing here was crawling so that these children could walk and their children could run.

And above all, I hope that they and all of us grow in holiness, which I am convinced includes a firm desire to maintain communion with the Church. The Church established by our Lord is not an idea or an invisible, spiritual Church. It's the Catholic Church, made up of sinful human beings but never abandoned by God's Spirit. Holiness is the only answer. The only real reforms come from the Spirit working through his saints. May God raise up many of them.