

U.S. bishops say pope affirming importance of Mass in both its forms

WASHINGTON - U.S. church leaders cautioned against what one called "early and false conclusions" about Pope Benedict XVI's July 7 document expanding the use of the Tridentine Mass and said it should be seen primarily as an affirmation of the importance of reverential participation in the Mass, whether in its ordinary or extraordinary form.

Cardinal Adam J. Maida of Detroit said the apostolic letter "Summorum Pontificum" showed the pope's "pastoral care for those members of the faithful who desire to worship God" with the Mass according to the 1962 Roman Missal, commonly known as the Tridentine rite.

But he said Pope Benedict's decision to allow priests to celebrate the earlier form of the Mass without their bishop's prior permission should not be seen "as calling into question the abiding significance of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council" but as a continuation of Pope John Paul II's efforts to reach out "to those who felt alienated from the church because of the exclusive use of the postconciliar ritual."

Bishop David A. Zubik of Green Bay, Wis., said in separate letters to priests and the faithful in the diocese July 7 that they must "be careful not to arrive at early and false conclusions" about the apostolic letter.

"Most importantly, I wish to state emphatically that the Mass is not changing," he wrote in both letters. "The normal way that we have been celebrating the Mass for the past 40 years remains. What you and I are asked to do is to open our hearts and be more aware of and attentive to those who have a spiritual need for the extraordinary form of celebrating the Mass."

Bishop Zubik told priests that the papal letter appeared to be "in response to serious concerns that have been expressed in countries other than our own."

Cardinal Sean P. O'Malley of Boston said in his Web log, or blog, that he also believed the document "will not result in a great deal of change for the Catholics in the U.S."

"The issue of the Latin Mass is not urgent for our country," he said in a June 29 entry, more than a week before the document was issued but after he had participated in a meeting at the Vatican about the apostolic letter. "I think they (Vatican officials) wanted us to be part of the conversation so that we would be able to understand what the situation is in countries where the numbers are very significant."

The cardinal, who was traveling July 9 and was not available to give a comment to Catholic News Service, told The Boston Globe newspaper that the change must be kept in perspective.

"There are some conservative Catholics who feel that everything ended with the (Second Vatican) Council, and some liberals who think that everything began with the council, and this Holy Father is trying to say that this is continuous growth, that it's the same church, and that we must try to avoid allowing the liturgy to become a battleground rather than a point of unification and communion for believers," he said in the July 7 telephone interview with the Globe.

Archbishop Raymond L. Burke of St. Louis, the only other U.S. prelate to participate in the Vatican meeting, had no public comment on the papal document, according to his spokeswoman.

Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl of Washington said Pope Benedict "is trying to reach out pastorally to those who feel an attraction to this form of the liturgy, and he is asking the pastors to be aware of and support their interest."

He noted that the Tridentine Mass already is celebrated weekly at three locations in the archdiocese, attended by about 500 people altogether.

A statement from the Diocese of Lincoln, Neb., said the document "will probably not have an immediate impact" on the diocese "since many of its provisions are already in place," with both the ordinary and extraordinary forms of the Mass celebrated

there.

"The presence in the Diocese of Lincoln of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter, in Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary in Denton as well as in St. Francis Chapel in Lincoln, and the permission already given to some priests of the diocese to use the 1962 Roman Missal, will undoubtedly contribute to a serene and even joyful implementation of 'Summorum Pontificum,'" the statement added.

It said Bishop Fabian W. Bruskewitz "occasionally celebrates" the Tridentine Mass himself and planned to do so July 16 at the Carmel Convent Chapel near Agnew, Neb.

Bishop Salvatore R. Matano of Burlington, Vt., said he would celebrate the Tridentine Mass Aug. 15 at St. Joseph Co-Cathedral to mark the feast of the Assumption and to ask "that all we do to celebrate her son's presence among us will bring glory to his name and harmony and peace among his people."

Because it has been 30 years since the Tridentine Mass was celebrated in the diocese, he said, local priests "must reacquaint themselves with its rubrics" and altar servers, choirs and cantors must be trained.

"At the same time, due to a severe shortage of priests, the first duty of the bishop and the pastors is to make the eucharistic sacrifice available to as many people as possible, using the rite that is understood by the majority of the faithful in attendance," Bishop Matano added. "When this fundamental need is met, attention can be given to significant numbers of the faithful who seek the celebration of this extraordinary form of the eucharistic liturgy."

Bishop Howard J. Hubbard of Albany, N.Y., expressed a similar concern about "the reality that there are many priests in our diocese serving two or three parishes and few priests who are trained to celebrate the 1962 Latin form."

He said he would consult with various groups in the diocese to "assess how best to implement this new instruction in keeping with the intent of the document to bring about unity in the church."

Archbishop John J. Myers of Newark, N.J., said the papal letter "is meant to

encourage unity among the people of this local church by embracing a diversity of the form of worship, but not the substance.”

“This expansion of available liturgies does provide priests with a freedom. However, all freedom brings with it responsibility,” he said, noting the need for “a stable community of the faithful for Mass in Latin to be offered publicly” and for priests celebrating the Tridentine Mass “to know fully both Latin and the rubrics” of the Mass.

Bishop John M. D’Arcy of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Ind., said Pope Benedict “has acted courageously and as a good shepherd,” reminiscent of the good shepherd in Chapter 10 of John’s Gospel: “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must lead them too, and they shall hear my voice. There will be one flock then, one shepherd.”