



SSPX FAQs

[DONATE](#)

[ARTICLES INDEX](#)

[APOLOGETIC MATERIALS](#)

[FOR PRIESTS](#)

[CHAPELS](#)

[SCHOOLS](#)

[CAMPS](#)

[RETREATS](#)

[APOSTOLATES](#)

[DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS](#)

[SSPX LINKS](#)

[THIRD ORDERS](#)

[VOCATIONAL INFO](#)

[PILGRIMAGES](#)

[AGAINST THE SOUND BITES](#)

[CATHOLIC FAQS](#)

[REGINA COELI REPORT](#)

[DISTRICT SUPERIOR'S LTRs](#)

[SUPERIOR GENERAL'S NEWS](#)

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The Indult Mass: should one attend it all?

Fr. Marc Van Es

Titled "The Attendance at Today's Sunday Masses", this article was originally featured in the June 1994 issue of *The Angelus*.

After He had created in six days the universe and all it contains, God rested on the seventh day.[1] Thus, it was by this "*divine repose*" that the duty for man to reserve for God a part of his weekly time was foreshadowed; a duty which is one of the elements of religion due and owed to the Creator by the creature. Meanwhile, this natural duty was not specified except by the Mosaic law,[2] which had fixed its observance on the last day of the week, the Sabbath and which had established its forms. However, the duty to sanctify the Sabbath was imposed only on the Jewish people. Then, under the New Law a change took place; in memory of the Resurrection of Christ and of the descent of the Holy Ghost on the Apostles, events which both happened on a Sunday, this duty became the Sunday precept as we know it today, characterized in particular by the duty of attendance at Mass.

But in our days we witness a multiplicity of Masses, all different one from the other, old or Tridentine, new or Conciliar, in traditional liturgical language or in the vernacular, for the young, for the handicapped, etc., etc.

In order to see a little more clearly on the subject of our Sunday duties today, let us first look at what the precept of Sunday Mass consists of, so as to examine subsequently the particular cases which are the attendance at the New Mass called that of "Pope Paul VI" and at the Mass called "with Indult."

The Sunday precept in general

From the beginning of the Christian era, it was the norm to sanctify feast days by the attendance at Mass. Why was this? To show by a public worship that we acknowledge the sovereignty of God over all things and, in consequence, our total dependence on Him. Such a duty was, however, at first, of a customary character. It did not become obligatory until, the year 506 A.D. through a provision of the Council of Agde.[3] This decree of a particular council was later transformed by custom into a universal law. One satisfies the duty of attending Sunday Mass by a conscious participation[4] in the whole of the Sacrifice, it being understood that this same Mass is celebrated in the Catholic Rite. This precept binds "*subgravi*" (i.e. under pain of mortal sin) all those who have reached the age of reason, i.e., seven years old.[5] But one can be excused from attending Mass in the case of

impossibility
resulting from:

- illness,
- distance (estimated at about one hour's journey),
- from the fear of grave inconvenience (e.g., the shame of a pregnant girl out of wedlock),
- grave danger (e.g., traveling under dangerous conditions such as icy roads),
- or from charity towards one's neighbors (e.g. a mother looking after her children), etc.

The case of attending the New Mass called the "Conciliar Mass" or "of Paul VI"

Following the directives and the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, a new *Ordo Missae* was promulgated by the Apostolic Constitution *Missale Romanum* on April 3, 1969. Composed with the help of Protestant ministers, it had as its aim "*to do everything to facilitate our separated brethren* (i.e., the Protestants and the Orthodox) *on the way to union, by avoiding every stumbling block and displeasing thing.*"[6] Composed so as to be acceptable to everyone, by this same deed all specifically Catholic marks disappeared. But very quickly the faithful, the clergy and some bishops resisted this reform by denouncing it as dangerous for the Faith. Cardinals Ottaviani and Bacci did not hesitate to write on this occasion, that "*the Novus Ordo represents, both as a whole and in its details, a striking departure from the Catholic theology of the Mass as it was formulated in Session XXII of the Council of Trent.*"[7]

Now what do we note in this reform of the Missal? The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the non-bloody renewal of the Sacrifice on Calvary has become a meal around a table, serving as a memorial, more or less a simple narrative of the Last Supper on Holy Thursday. The worship of the real Eucharistic Presence has been diminished and is no longer signified, by the suppression of genuflections, by the precious lining of the sacred vessels, by the placing aside of the tabernacle, by the placing of communion in the hand while standing, etc. Finally, the priest, sole minister and acting *in persona Christi*, has become president and brother of the people of God, barely distinct from them in the distribution of the Eucharist and in the readings. A series of facts which demonstrate the Protestantization of this New Mass, a Mass which can be used by the Protestants themselves because "*theologically this is possible.*"[8]

Now, what about attending these new Masses? First of all, they constitute a danger to the faith of the faithful:

one can... without any exaggeration say that most of these Masses

are sacrilegious and that they impoverish all Faith by diminishing it. The taking away of the sacredness is such that this Mass risks losing its supernatural character, "its mystery of faith" to become no more than an act of natural religion.[9]

This truth is confirmed by the evidence of numerous priests who have said this New Mass as well as by the attitude of the faithful in general who attend it, Even occasionally, in whom one notices unfortunately a lack of the spirit of prayer and recollection. The danger is likewise increased through the sermons heard, by the bad example seen and by becoming accustomed to the sacrileges committed.

The first consequence then is that attendance at such a Mass could become a sinful act for the Catholics warned of the danger.

In the second place, attendance at the New Mass signifies in some way one's approval, particularly if one receives Communion. It is a point of Catholic doctrine, recognized moreover by other religions, that he who receives the offering made during a religious ceremony recognizes in some implicit way, by his participation, this same religious cult. It is because of this that Saint Paul declared on the subject of food offered to idols, to take care not to become an occasion of scandal for those who surround us.

"Because if someone sees you, you who have knowledge, seated at a table in the idol's temple" (today we would say at the table of the Conciliar supper), *"shall not his conscience, being weak, bring him"* to attend and to receive communion at the New Mass.

And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ hath died? Now when you sin thus against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

That is why the attendance and communion at the New Mass leads others to do the same; this thus becomes an occasion of loss of faith for our neighbor, it would be better to stop forever from frequenting this New Mass.[10]

In the same way, St. Thomas Aquinas adds, that he

who receives the Sacrament from a doubtful minister (suspended, demoted, we may nowadays add dubious as to his intentions) sins for his part and does not receive the effect of the sacrament, unless excused through ignorance.[11]

But whoever communicates with another who is in sin, becomes a sharer in his sin. Hence we read in II John that 'He says unto him, God speed you, communicates with his wicked words.[12]

Consequently, it is not lawful to receive communion from them, or to assist at their Mass.[13] Thus

by refusing to hear the Masses of such priests, or to receive communion from them, we are not shunning God's sacraments; on

the contrary, by so doing we are giving them honor.[13]

What practical consequence can we draw from this?

These new Masses, not only cannot be the object of the obligation of the Sunday precept but one should apply, in their regard, the rules of moral theology and of Canon Law, which are those of supernatural prudence with regard to the participation or attendance, as an act perilous to our Faith or eventual sacrilege.[9]

This teaching demands on the part of the faithful an effort, sometimes very meritorious, of traveling long distances to come regularly or at least periodically to the Tridentine Mass. This also demands total abstention from attending at the New Mass; a passive attendance is tolerated for a serious reason *"to render honor or for a polite obligation"* (as for example for the marriage or funeral of a relative or friend), *"as long as there is no peril of perversion and of scandal."*[14]

In any case, no authority can oblige us to put our faith in danger. The children who attend so-called "Catholic" schools are particularly exposed by the fact of their lack of foundation and of discernment. It would be better to stay at home on Sunday, to say the family rosary, to read in your missal the Mass of the day or to read a spiritual book (Catechism, Lives of the Saints, etc.) rather than to expose oneself to the disquiet and to the imperceptible but certain alteration of our Catholic Faith, a treasure so rare in our days.

The case of attending the traditional Mass said under the "Indult"

Despite all the efforts of the official hierarchy since 1969, a few bishops, many priests, and a great number of the faithful have remained attached to the two-thousand-year old traditional rite of Mass. Time passed but the problem remained. In order to resolve it, Pope John Paul II gave to the diocesan bishops the faculty of making use of an indult so as to allow priests to say and faithful to attend the Mass contained in the Roman Missal edited in 1962; the missal moreover used by the Society of St. Pius X. That was the indult promulgated by the Congregation for the Divine Worship on October 3, 1984,¹⁵ an indult we shall see hereafter, made unacceptable through the intention of its legislators and by the conditions of its application. The consecrations of June 30, 1988, occurring, Pope John Paul II made use of this with regards to the traditionalists.

Now, what about attending a Tridentine Mass celebrated under the indult?

First of all, it constitutes a danger for the faith of the faithful, a danger which comes from the priests themselves who are celebrating it. Because to obtain this indult from the official hierarchy, these priests must fulfill the following conditions:

That it should be very clear that these priests have nothing to do with those who place in doubt... the doctrinal soundness of the Roman Missal promulgated by Pope Paul VI, in 1970 and that their position

should be without any ambiguity and publicly known.[15]

Thus is it necessary that these priests prove publicly by their behavior, their words and writings, shorn of ambiguities, that they admit "*the doctrinal soundness*" of the New Mass. No question in any way whatsoever of criticizing the Protestant and definitely non-Catholic look of Pope Paul VI's New Mass.

Cardinal Mayer, former president of *Ecclesia Dei* placed in charge of re-integrating the Traditionalists in the Conciliar Church, added the following condition: these same priests "*can obtain*" this indult "*on the condition that they be in normal juridical standing with their bishops or religious superiors.*" 16 One remembers that dozens of priests have been unjustly put out of their churches or their religious houses for the simple fact of continuing to say without change the Tridentine Mass, except for a good number of those who were favored by certain circumstances (age, distance etc.). May we ask these indult favored priests at what cost or compromise with the integral Catholic Faith have they kept or obtained "*normal legal relations*" with the hierarchy? Compromise which, for example, could appear in the fact of giving hosts doubtfully consecrated during a previous conciliar Mass or even through the manner of celebrating the traditional Mass full of hesitations and mistakes, sometimes even cause of scandal.

There is a danger too for the Faith, that comes from the proximity of the faithful who attend exclusively these indult Masses, because they also have to fulfill the conditions of not placing in doubt the "*doctrinal soundness*" of the New Mass.15 Characteristically, these type of faithful, unfortunately too often, are concerned with reconciling in thought and in action the truth with heresy, Tradition with the conciliar spirit.

Secondly from the very nature of the indult: an indult is "*a concession from the authority which dispenses its subjects from the obligation of keeping a law.*" 17 "*The indult is an exception. It can always be withdrawn. It confirms the general rule*" 18 which is the New Mass, the conciliar liturgy. Because, to use a special permission, is this not to recognize and legitimize *ipso facto* the general law, that is to say the legal suppression of the two thousand year-old traditional rite?

Indeed, to obtain the indult of 1984, one must fulfill the following conditions:

that it should be quite clear that those priests and those faithful have nothing to do with those who place in question the legitimacy of the Roman Missal promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1970.[15]

Furthermore "this concession... should be utilized without prejudice to the observance of the liturgical reform (of Pope Paul VI) in the life of ecclesiastical communities"[15] of the Conciliar Church.

Therefore no question of them advertising for the universal usage of the Traditional Mass. They must be made to recognize that this Tridentine Mass was validly, legally and legitimately abrogated or forbidden. No question either or calling the worth, always actual, of the words of the Pope St. Pius V:

by virtue of Our Apostolic authority We give and grant in perpetuity,

that for the singing or the reading of Mass in any church whatsoever this Missal (that is to say, the Tridentine Mass), may be followed absolutely, without any scruple of conscience or fear of incurring any penalty, judgment or censure, and may be freely and lawfully used. [19] [cf. this article for more on this topic: [The legitimacy of Quo Primum today](#)]

The third point to tackle is this: to attend the "indult" Mass is at least to approve implicitly and to encourage the work of the destruction of Catholic Tradition undertaken by the official hierarchy. To prove this assertion, let us look first of all at the intentions of some of those responsible, to see some precise facts.

In the first place the intention of Pope John Paul II himself, using this indult to favor the winning over of "traditional Catholics" to conciliar Rome:

The Holy See has granted... the faculty of using the liturgical books in use in 1962... It is very evident that, far from seeking to put a brake on the application of the reform (of the New Mass) undertaken after the Council (by Pope Paul VI), this concession is destined to facilitate the ecclesial communion (that is to say their reinstatement in the Conciliar Church) of people who feel themselves attached to these liturgical forms.[20]

What now of the intentions and hopes of Cardinal Mayer, former president of the *Ecclesia Dei Commission*? He said:

There are grounds to hope that, with the concerted efforts on the part of all concerned a substantial number of priests and seminarians will find the strength to renounce a 'state of mind' which until now was full of prejudices, of accusations and of disinformation... We have good reason to believe that the charity with which the priests coming from Archbishop Lefebvre and returning into the Church will be received, will contribute greatly to the fulfillment of this hope that, following them, numerous faithful whom they had served up till then, would also return into the ecclesial communion (with the Conciliar Church) through their mediation. Sometimes a temporary solution may be necessary, such as allowing them the possibility of celebrating the Holy Mass[21] (of Pope St. Pius V).

In the hands of the official hierarchy, the Tridentine Mass serves therefore as a temporary means and bait to attract the traditional priests and people and to destroy at the same time the work of Catholic restoration, started by Archbishop Lefebvre, Bishop de Castro Mayer and their priests. Means and bait to attract the traditional Catholics now considered as schismatics because they are no longer considered as "being in communion" with the present-day Rome, of liberal and modernist tendency. It is to be further noted that the Commission *Ecclesia Dei* could be generous for a time in the concessions granted to priests - a question of making them bite at the bait. But if through their "*mediation*" more or less conscious, their faithful do not return into the conciliar fold, it is to be anticipated that they will be judged as useless instruments and will find themselves either in the obligation to fulfill other conditions to keep that permission, or even to simply

see the aforesaid permission withdrawn.

Let us now move on to some illustrating facts: having received the permission to celebrate the Tridentine Rite, the Fraternity of St. Peter now see themselves threatened to accept giving communion in the hand[22] and saying the Mass of 1965, 22 having already accepted by one of their superiors, "*all the documents of the Vatican II Council.*"[23] Hundreds of priests, seminarians and faithful have been lured with the Tridentine Rite and now are made to forcibly return to the ranks and the spirit of the Council. This work of destruction continues by the approval of Indult Masses close to our important Mass centers... A good method to empty these last ones or at least to prevent them from developing.

That is why, what can look like a concession is in reality merely a maneuver to separate from us the largest number of faithful possible. This is the perspective in which they seem to be always giving a little more and even going very far. We must absolutely convince our faithful that it is no more than a maneuver, that it is dangerous to put oneself into the hands of Conciliar bishops and modernist Rome. It is the greatest danger threatening our people. If we have struggled for twenty years to avoid the Conciliar errors, it was not in order, now, to put ourselves in the hands of those professing these errors.[18]

To attempt to restore the traditional Mass without considering the historical context of the crisis of the Faith is to become a blind instrument in the hands of the conciliar hierarchy.

What final conclusion can we draw from all this?

That the precept of attending Sunday Mass is obligatory for all Catholics who have reached the age of reason (seven years old) but that some may be excused particularly those who are only near Masses "*of Pope Paul VI*" or to traditional Masses said under the "Indult." Why? Firstly, because of the danger for the faith coming either from the priests who celebrate or from the faithful who attend them; secondly, legitimization is given to the new liturgy and finally an approval more or less implicit of the work of destruction of the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Tradition.

Footnotes

1 Gen. 2: 2-3.

13 *Summa Theologica*, III, Q. 82, A. 9.

2 Ex. 20 :8, Lev. 23 :3, Deut. 5 :15,
Ex. 31 :14.

14 Can. 1258, 2 (CIC 1917).

3 Gratian: *Dist. I De cons.* c.3.

15 Indult of the Sacred Congregation
of Divine Worship of Oct 3, 1984 in
Fideliter, No. 42, Nov-Dec 1984, pp

4 Can. 1247 (1917 Code of Canon

Law).

5 Can. 12 (1917 Code of Canon Law).

6 Fr. A. Bugnini: *L'Osservatore Romano* (Mar 19, 1965) in *Documentation Catholique*, Apr 4, 1965, No. 1445, p. 603.

7 [A Short Critical Study of the Novus Ordo Missae](#) (also commonly known as The Ottaviani Intervention), TAN Books and Publishers, 1992.

8 Declaration of the Protestant minister Max Thurian: *La Croix*, May 30, 1969; p. 10.

9 Position of Archbishop Lefebvre on the New Mass and the Pope (Nov 8, 1979), *Cor Unum*, No. 4, Nov 1979, pp 3-9.

10 This is strongly inspired by I Cor 8.

11 *Summa Theologica*, III, Q. 64, A. 9.

12 II John 11.

18-19.

16 *30 Days*, No. 6, June 1989, p. 48.

17 F. Roberti, P. Palazzini, *Dizionario di Theologia Morale*, Ed. Studium, Roma, 1955, article "Indulto".

18 Interview with Archbishop Lefebvre, *Fideliter*, No. 70, July-August 1989, pp 13-14.

19 Bull [Quo Primum Tempore](#) of Pope Saint Pius V, July 14, 1570.

20 Audience of Sept 28, 1990 to the Benedictine Monks of Le Barroux. *L'Osservatore Romano* (French edition), Oct 2, 1990, No. 40.

21 Letter of Cardinal Mayer to Msgr. May, *L'Homme Nouveau*, March 19, 1989.

22 *Controverses*, No. 42; Jan 1992, p. 3.

23 *Controverses*, No. 37; Oct 1991, p. 4.