

What is the Tridentine Mass?

### **Tridentine Mass**

The Tridentine Mass is the old form of Mass that was authorised for use throughout the Roman Catholic Church from 1570 until it was replaced following the second Vatican Council in the 1960s.

In a Tridentine Mass:

- everything is in Latin,
  - the priest conducts the liturgy facing East, leading the community who are behind him
  - everything happens strictly and precisely according to the rubrics (instructions)
  - the congregation follows the Mass in private prayer and doesn't play an active part
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- **Why was the Mass changed?**
    - In changing the Mass the Church saw that there were two types of content in the liturgy.
    - Some of it, especially the sacraments, was unchangeable, because it was 'of divine institution' and the Church had a duty to guard it.
    - But other parts of the liturgy *were changeable* and the Church decided that it could (and sometimes should) alter and adapt those to serve the community better and make it easier for people to take the liturgy to their hearts.
  - **People and priest**
    - In the new version of the Mass the priest faces the congregation as part of the community and the congregation themselves play a much more active part in the service.
    - The liturgists believed that the Mass was the concern of the whole Body of Christ - including the members of the Church, and therefore they said liturgy should be "celebrated in community with the active participation of the faithful".
    - They added
      - To promote active participation, acclamations by the people are favoured, responses, the chanting of psalms, antiphons, canticles, also actions or gestures and bodily postures. One should also observe a period of silence at an appropriate time.
  - **Latin**
    - The most obvious difference between the old Mass and the new Mass was that it promoted the use of the language of the place where the mass was being celebrated (vernacular language) rather than Latin. (Many people think that Vatican II banned the use of Latin; it didn't do that at all.)
    - This was done, as Pope John Paul II put it, "so that every individual can understand and proclaim in his or her mother tongue the wonders of God".
    - This wasn't a total rejection of history, as some thought; in the earliest days of Christianity liturgy would have been in the local languages of Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek. Latin became a popular church language first in Africa, later spreading to Rome. Latin did not achieve total supremacy in the Church until the 7th century.
  - **History of the Tridentine Mass**
    - The final version of the Tridentine Mass was codified in 1570 by the Council of Trent, but some of the material in it is nearly 1000 years older.

- The Council of Trent was a response by the Catholic Church to the dramatic upheaval of the Reformation. Roman Catholic bishops met for 25 sessions of debate between 1545 and 1563; further discussions continued in Rome for years afterwards.
- Liturgical reform wasn't the Council's only result; it led to the founding of the Jesuits, a revision of the Church Calendar and much clarification and codification of Catholic doctrine.
- The liturgical problem was that many local variations on the Mass had been created in the confusion that followed the Reformation, not all of them of high quality or in line with the central doctrine. The Church realised that different liturgies could become a real threat to unity.
- The liturgical reforms were made by a commission set up for the purpose by Pope Pius V. Their job was to create new, centrally authorised orders of service that every Church in every country would have to use. They issued the *Breviarum Romanum* in 1568 and the *Missale Romanum* in 1570.
- The Council of Trent carried out considerable reforms in the sphere of Catholic worship by removing many appalling abuses and by rearranging the form of the Catholic liturgy.
- But the Tridentine reforms were in fact more in the nature of a restoration of the medieval status quo than a truly constructive and creative renewal of Christian worship in the light of the Gospel and arising from a need to adapt worship to the requirements of a new age.

*John Harper, The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy from the Tenth to the Eighteenth Century, 1991*

- The liturgists went back to an earlier form of Mass (1472) and cleaned things up, removing what one theologian called "the rank and monstrous excesses which had, particularly during the later Middle Ages, crept into the Mass".
- They produced an order of service that laid down in minute detail what would be done and said at each stage of the Mass, and so gave churches a simple and effective template for worship that could be shared by congregations everywhere.
- The Mass remained unchanged for 400 years, and served the Church well, despite coming in for much criticism in more recent times, largely for giving the congregation virtually no active role to play in the service.

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/ritesrituals/tridentinemass\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/ritesrituals/tridentinemass_1.shtml)