

Mass Appeal: How the Traditional Mass Engages All Five Senses

By Brian Williams on Jan 30, 2016 10:44 am

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Back in the nineteenth century Father Frederick Faber famously wrote that the Mass was the “most beautiful thing this side of heaven.” As every Mass is a re-presentation of Calvary, and the altar itself the place where heaven and earth meet, one can understand why Saint Peter Julian Eymard called the Holy Sacrifice the “holiest act of religion.” Understanding all of this to be true, is it any wonder that more of the faithful are seeking a liturgy which seeks to restore a sense of the sacred?

For many, the Traditional Latin Mass is fulfilling just such a need. Rediscovering the manner in which the Church has worshipped for centuries has helped a growing number of Catholics to encounter the Lord more deeply. What many are realizing is

just how effectively, and beautifully, the traditional Masses engage our senses. Indeed, it is a Mass for all senses.

Sight

The Latin Mass presents a visual which immediately speaks to the true focus of our adoration and worship. As the priest offers the Mass *ad orientem* (facing the altar or the liturgical east) we immediately recognize that the liturgy is not about us. This is something that simply must be experienced by the faithful to fully appreciate. In the past I have called this a true “game changer”, and it is. There is a significant liturgical catechesis in the simple fact that the priest is *facing with* the congregation, instead of *facing* the congregation. Far too many Catholics have experienced anthropocentric masses over the years, liturgies in which priest and faithful seem to focus their gaze upon each other. Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, the former Secretary for the Congregation for Divine Worship, said that often in the modern liturgy the priest has become a “showman”. As the priest spends much of the Traditional Mass facing the same direction as the faithful, speaking Latin the entire time, there is little confusion as to who he is speaking to.

Hearing

The use of a liturgical language is another manner in which the traditional Mass effectively engages our senses. Maintaining an aura of mystery and antiquity, the liturgical use of Latin immediately transports the faithful from the secular into the sacred. The familiarity and comfort of the vernacular is left behind as we enter into the Holy Mass.



However, it is also the absence of sound that catches our attention. This becomes most obvious during that most venerable of prayers, the Canon of the Mass. Dating back at least to the sixth century and Pope St. Gregory the Great, the Roman Canon (called Eucharistic Prayer 1 in the New Mass) is spoken nearly inaudibly by the priest. The great nineteenth century Benedictine liturgist Dom Prosper Guéranger describes this silence by stating that the priest “then enters within the cloud” with his voice not being heard again until the “Great Prayer is concluded”. This silence is only interrupted at the moment of consecration by the ringing of sanctus bells, signifying Our Lord’s presence on the Altar.

Many newcomers to the Latin Mass are struck by this absence of sound. Our culture puts a premium on noise. Silence, intentional silence, can be quite jarring at first. However, over time, the faithful learn once again how to use this silence to *pray* the Mass, instead of simply *going* to Mass.

Finally, if one is so blessed as to hear a High Mass, they will be treated to some of the most beautiful music ever created. A few years back Archbishop Alexander Sample noted that not all religious music is sacred music, but rather that which possesses three qualities: sanctity, beauty and universality. While seventies Haugen and Haas music, or nineties Praise and Worship songs, might be *about* God, we can objectively say that they are not sacred music. Liturgical music, true sacred music, is Gregorian chant and polyphony. The liturgical movement of the twentieth century sought to recover this musical heritage of the Church. From canonized popes (St. Pius X) to ecumenical councils (Vatican II), Holy Mother Church has consistently reaffirmed that this music is most appropriate for the Mass.

Smell



The use of incense within the Mass communicates to our olfactory receptors that we have entered into the sacred as this is not a scent identified with the hum drum of daily life. We find incense referenced all the way back in sacred scripture by St. John in the Apocalypse as he describes his vision of the heavenly worship, where an Angel holds a golden censer near the altar, upon which stands the lamb. The Church incorporates the use of incense during the Mass to symbolize the smoke of purification and sanctification. Incense is also understood to represent the prayers of the faithful rising to heaven.

Touch

Our sense of touch is most fully realized through the frequent posture of kneeling within the ancient rite. Simply put, we kneel more at the old Mass. During a Low Mass the faithful kneel from the prayers at the foot of the altar in the beginning all the way until the reading of the Gospel. During the Creed we also kneel when professing that Christ was incarnated and born of the Virgin Mary. Most notably, the faithful kneel to receive Holy Communion.

Taste

The final of the five senses is taste. The reception of Holy Communion, kneeling and on the tongue, fosters a true sense of awareness in the faithful. We are more clearly able to perceive what it is (or more accurately *Who* it is) we cannot touch. In the Traditional Mass only the consecrated hands of the priest touches Holy Communion. This was the universal practice of the Church for over a thousand years and, now more than ever, speaks to the sacredness of the moment. The children of Holy Mother Church are spiritually nourished by the Bread of Life.

Concluding Thought

This most sublime moment of Holy Communion concludes our walk through the Mass of all senses. Understanding and appreciating that we are indeed both body and spirit, the Traditional Mass engages each of our five senses, thereby drawing us even deeper into the Eucharistic mystery. In the field of education many readily accept that people learn through a variety of senses: some are more visual, some auditory, others more tactile. Stepping outside of the more contentious liturgical skirmishes of recent decades, let us extend that same understanding of communication to the Sacred Liturgy. It is my hope that more faithful Catholics would seek out and avail themselves to the traditional Mass. May the Mass of the Saints lift our spirits toward heaven through the engagement of our senses.

Editor's Note: It is indeed possible for the Novus Ordo be offered in a reverent and sensory-immersive way. That said, it very easily can be offered in a way that is both irreverent and banal (and unfortunately frequently is). While abuses can occur at any Mass, we would argue that the ancient Mass offers a more consistently transcendent and solemn experience.

The Following is From the Book of Heaven

Senses of the Soul Who Lives in the Divine Will

✓2 – *Aug. 12, 1899* - "My daughter, this morning I want to conform you completely to Myself. I want you to think with my own mind, look with my own eyes, listen with my own ears, speak with my own tongue, operate with my own hands, walk with my own feet, and love with my own Heart."

After this, Jesus united His senses, mentioned above, to mine, and I saw that He was giving me His own shape; not only this, but He gave me the grace to make use of it as He Himself did.

✓2 – *Oct. 21, 1899* - I saw my dearest Jesus, but so in suffering, offended and indignant with the people as to strike terror. Immediately I began to say to Him: 'Lord, I offer You your wounds, your Blood, the most holy use of your senses which You made during the course of your mortal life, to repair for the offenses and for the bad use of the senses which creatures make.'

And Jesus, assuming a serious look, almost thundering, said: "Do you know how the senses of creatures have become? Like the screams of fierce animals, which

drive men away with their roars, not allowing them to draw near. The rot and the multiplicity of sins is such that it spurts from their senses, which force me to flee."

V2 – Oct. 25, 1899 - 'Tell me, my only Good, how could I sweeten this poisonous echo for You which afflicts You so much?' And He: "The only means is that you always do all your actions with the sole purpose of pleasing Me, and that you employ all your senses and powers for the purpose of loving Me and of glorifying Me. Let your every thought, word, and everything else, want nothing but the love you have for Me; in this way your echo will rise pleasant to my throne and will sweeten my hearing."

V23 – Jan. 6, 1928 – "My daughter, if you want all your senses to harmonize with Us, never go out of My Will; if you want to receive always from your Creator and open the feasts with Us, let It alone be your life, your all."

V23 – Dec. 13, 1928 – "...do you know who feels all the effects of Our many Happinesses that are spread in the Creation descend into her interior, to the point of remaining soaked with them like a sponge? One who lives in Our Divine Will.

"Our Happinesses are not foreign to her, because, since she has her taste purified by Our Fiat and not corrupted by the human will, her taste and all of her senses have the virtue of enjoying all the happinesses that are present in the created things, and We feel so much happiness and joy in seeing one who does Our Will as though sitting at the table of Our Happinesses and feeding herself with as many different bites for as many as are the happinesses present in the created things. Oh! how beautiful it is to see the creature happy."

V36 – April 12, 1938 - My God, how many Wonders, how many Surprises there are in Your Will. Its Sweet Enchantment is so great that not only does one remain captivated, but as if embalmed—Transformed in the Wonders of the Fiat in such a way that one doesn't know how to get out of It. So, I was thinking to myself: what is the difference between one who Lives in the Divine Will, one who is resigned to the painful circumstances of life and one who doesn't do the Divine Will at all?

My sweet Jesus, coming back added: "My blessed daughter, the difference is so big that there is no comparison at all. One who Lives in My Will has Dominion over all and We Love her so much that We even let her dominate Ourselves. We are so pleased in seeing the little creature dominating Us that We feel unusual Joy, because We see that Our Will Dominates in the creature and she dominates together with Our Will. O!, how many times We let her win. Many times Our Joy is so Great that We let Our Will win in the creature instead of in Ourselves. Further, by Living

in the Divine Will—being in continuous contact with It—she acquires Divine Senses. She acquires a long sight. Her light is so penetrating and clear, that she can even fix herself in God, in whom she sees the Divine Mysteries. She can touch Our Sanctity and Beauty, Loving them and possessing them. With this Eye of Light she can find her Creator everywhere—there's nothing in which she can't find Him. With His Majesty and His Love, He bundles the creature and makes her feel how much He Loves her. In feeling her love, He Loves her and, O! how Unspeakable the Joys on both parts—feeling His Love and loving Him in everything. She acquires Divine Hearing, and soon she hears what We want; she is always intent on listening to Us, and there is no need to repeat again and again what We want. A small sign is enough and all is done.

“She acquires a Divine Sense of Smell. By merely smelling she feels whether what is around her is Good, Holy and belongs to Us. She acquires Divine Taste—to the extent that she fills herself with Love and all that is Heaven. Finally, in Our Will she acquires Our Touch, so that all is Pure and Holy, and there is no fear that even the smallest breath may shade her—all Beautiful, lovely and pretty—the one who Lives in My Fiat.

“On the other hand, one who is only resigned does not live in continuous contact with Us. It can be said that she does not know anything about Our Supreme Being. Her sight is so weak and sickly, that it is painful for her even to look. She suffers from the last stage of myopia, and she can hardly see even the most necessary things. She can hardly hear, and how very much it takes to make her listen—if she listens at all. Her smell, taste and touch sense what is human. She feeds herself with earthly things—feels the touch of passions, and the sweetness of mundane pleasures. She doesn't even do My Will every day, but only in painful circumstances and encounters, when My Will offers her a suffering. O, poor creatures without My continuous Will. How weak they grow—so nervous and ill as to move to pity! How I pity them. Finally, one who is not even resigned—blind and with no sense of smell, loses the taste for every good. She is a poor paralytic who can't really help herself. She imprisons herself in a web of unhappiness and sins, and is not able to get out.”