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The Restoration of Holy Week

The timeline in modern times

By Russell Hardiman

Introduction

There are precursors in ecclesial legislation impacting on the celebration of Holy Week at all levels which can be cited from many eras and epochs.

1215

Lateran Council IV prescribed for all the baptised the duty of receiving communion at least once a year, a pattern that was eventually known as the Easter Duty.

1474

In Milan was published the first printed the first Missal of the Roman Church under the title *Ordo missalis secundum consuetudinem Romanae Curiae* [Order of the Roman Mass according to the customs of the Roman Curia].

1545-1563

Under the mandate of the Council of Trent it was left to the Roman Pontiff to prepare a single printed text of the Roman Missal on the principles according to the Holy Fathers [that is, based the extant texts and manuscripts of the early fathers of the Church]. Another significant mandate of Trent was that any diocese, monastery, or religious order whose service books were 200 years old could continue to use them, presumably because they would not have been influenced by Protestant churches.

1570

Pope Pius V published the first *Missale Romanum* under the mandate of Trent and promulgated with his authority as Pope by the Decree *ad perpetuam rei memoriam* [in perpetual memorial]. This same document has traditionally been printed in first place of all subsequent decrees of Pope's who had decreed further changes in the Missal. This document is still so published today.

1580

The establishment of the Congregation of Rites created a structural format whereby the ongoing revision of the new additions of the various liturgical books of the Roman Rite could be undertaken in printed form – a modern technology allowing a uniform text to serve the whole of the Latin Rite.

1634

Urban VIII was the third Pope to promulgate a revised edition of the *Roman Missal* after Pius V and Clement VIII (1614).

The Apostolic Constitution *Universa per Orbem* of Urban VIII on 24.9.1634 declared the last three days of Holy Week were no longer holy days of obligation but merely classified as working days. As a result the attendance of the bulk of the faithful was difficult, when the Holy Week services were in the morning, the priority of working hours in the rural areas and in the slowly industrialising cities of Europe. Over time, one poor pastoral outcome was the local clergy often conducted

the services of the Holy Week Triduum with only a few participants. A further consequence was the evolution of local devotional practices such as a Good Friday evening Procession of the *Madonna Adolorata* [the Sorrowful Mother] which was celebrated in the villages in public view in the evening when people could attend.

The focus on the requirement of the Easter Communion was gradually spread over several weeks, and then even further until the time frame was set from Ash Wednesday to Pentecost Sunday. The focus on the Easter Communion became a serial practice requiring Confession and Communion which was given more emphasis than the actual events of Christ's Redemption of the world.

1903-1914

In the era of St Pope Pius X he set out to encourage active participation in the liturgy especially in the use of Gregorian Chant as the medium of participation. In encouraging regular Communion he reduced the age for receiving Communion to the age of reason, set about age six. He also encouraged regular and frequent Communion for all, even Daily Communion. This was facilitated in various ways, especially where Sodalities dedicated to various devotions, catering for groups and categories in the Parishes, in a roster system of each group who had their monthly Communion on a certain Sunday.

1948 *Commissione Piana*

On May 28 1948 Pius XII nominated a Commission to plan a review of Liturgical Reform of Holy Week and Easter. This body was set up by Pope Pius, hence *Commissione Piana*. Actually its functional role was not published for nearly 14 years, in the preparation for Vatican II and its *Liturgy Constitution*. This Piana Commission followed the previous initiatives of Pius XII including:

- the major encyclicals of *Corpus Christi* (on the Church, 1943);
- *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (on the value of Scripture studies, 1943);
- *Mediator Dei* (on the Liturgy, 1947); and
- commissioning new studies on the Psalms.

Pius XII had given his supreme authority to the Liturgical Movement then growing in the Church, since the time of Pius X. In addressing in Rome the delegates at The First International Congress of Pastoral Liturgy at Assisi-Rome, Pope Pius called the Liturgical Movement "the movement of the Holy Spirit in the Church." The Liturgy had taken a definitive pathway with a strong pastoral orientation and built on the principle of the practices of the fathers of the early Church. In this environment Pius XII added to the responsibilities of the historic section of the Sacred Congregation of Rites a project focussing on liturgical reform of The Easter Vigil. In the twelve years from 28 June 1948 to 8 July 1960 the Piana Commission met eighty two times in absolute secrecy.

9.2.1951

The Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Solemnis vigilia paschalis instauratur* [the Solemn Easter Vigil is restored] prescribed the restored order of The Easter Vigil of the Western Church. In tandem, Pope Pius XII restored an option to the Ordinaries of Dioceses to choose to celebrate, as an experiment, the restored Vigil of Easter using the rubrics of the new *Ordo Sabbati Sancti* [the Ordo of Holy Saturday].

11.1.1952

The Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Instaurata vigilia paschalis* [The Easter Vigil is Restored], was a twelve page pamphlet articulating special rubrics about the Restored Vigil service; the preparation for it; the hour to celebrate the Vigil; special rules for fasting before Communion at an evening Mass; as well as similar adaptations for the Divine Office to be said on Holy Saturday.

These changes were to be carried out over a three year experimental period.

6.1.1953

Pius XII's Apostolic Constitution, *Christus Dominus* [Christ the Lord], and an Instruction from the Holy Office changing the fast from the previous midnight before receiving Communion and also water did not break the fast. This allowed that evening Masses could be celebrated almost anywhere, and for sundry motives. The feedback from bishops of dioceses and the reports to these ordinaries from their own parish priests, passed on to the Holy See, added to the positive feedback on the increasing celebrations of the Easter Vigil rituals truly be an evening service.

19.7.1955

Pope Pius XII commissioned the Cardinals of the Sacred Congregation of Rites to review the whole question of Easter in an Extraordinary Session. He accepted the submissions of the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation. The Pope then delivered a decree confirming the Order of Holy Week was to be restored, and new books or *Ordines* were to be prepared.

16.11.1955

The Decree and Instruction of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Maxima Redemptionis Nostrae mysteria* [the great mysteries of our redemption], gave the theology and patristic background to the significance of the Easter Vigil as the culmination of the Triduum back to Passion Sunday now that the Liturgical Order of Holy Week was restored. This was the confluence of several experiments with the Restored Easter Rite of Holy Week with the Vigil being returned to a true vigil time frame as an evening service.

1956

The Vatican Polyglott Press published a 144 page altar book for the Restored Rite of Holy Week; *ORDO HEBDOMADAE SANCTAE INSTAURATUS* [the Restored Order of Holy Week] from 1956. Each individual service or occasion had both the Divine Office and the Proper of Mass printed with reference to the Breviaries and what texts were to be said in the afternoon and evening times.

In the Ordo, the eight pages featuring the public proclamation of the Solemn Prayers for the Church are the oldest extant form of the Prayer of the Faithful. These were to be a major revival in all Masses in the principles of the Vatican II Liturgy Constitution and in the Roman Missal of Paul VI. The text about praying for 'the perfidious Jews' has become a focus in recent years in issues of inclusive language.

At the same time, the Turin based Catholic Publishers, Marietti, published a 108 page Missal.

1958

Death of Pope Pius XII.

Conclave elects Pope John XXIII.

25. 1.1959

During the Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity, at the Basilica of St Paul's Outside the Walls at Vespers, John XXIII announced an Ecumenical Council would be summoned in 1962.

7.3.1965

The Sacred Congregation of Rites and *The Consilium for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Liturgy* released the Decree *Quamplures episcopi* [So many Bishops] promulgated the changes in the Ordo for Holy Week. This allowed priests to concelebrate with the bishop for the Mass of the Oils, even before the texts of the Rite of Concelebration and the Roman Pontifical after Vatican II had been promulgated.

In the same document, Rome modified a phrase in the Solemn Prayers for Good Friday, particularly focused on the petition praying the phrase "perfidious Jews" by changing it to read in fidelity to the Decrees and mind of Vatican II regarding ecumenism. (In the text I have consulted, at the prayers for the Jews, the word 'perfidious' had been scratched with a modern biro, so this may have been used till recent times).

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