

Can the pope or bishops restrict the Latin Mass?



Question: Do Pope Francis or our bishops actually have authority to restrict the Latin Mass? The Council of Trent codified the Latin Mass from earlier liturgies, approving the Roman Missal used from 1570. Pope Benedict also taught in *Summorum Pontificum* that the pre-Conciliar Mass could not be suppressed.

– Kevin Brehmer, Toledo, Ohio

Answer: This is a complex issue that includes both liturgical and canonical considerations. Arguably, the older form of the Mass in use before 1962 cannot be abrogated – that is, it cannot be declared to be invalid or illicit to celebrate. It is an ancient form of the Mass extending back some 1,500 years; far older than the norm established by the Council of Trent, which forbade the suppression of a rite or form of the Mass older than 200 years. Hence it would seem that any priest can use this form of the Mass.

That said, a diocesan bishop is the moderator of the sacred liturgy in his diocese. As such, he can establish norms for the public celebration of holy Mass that regulate when and where variations of the holy Mass can be celebrated. For example, beginning in 2015, the Anglican Use of the Roman rite was approved for celebration in the Church. But that did not mean that every parish could use this rite (which is much like the Traditional Latin Mass, but in English). Rather, the bishop could designate places and priests which or who could licitly celebrate this form of the Mass. This is what bishops do.

With this in mind, the recent *motu proprio*, *Traditiones*

Custodes, has placed the questions of who can celebrate the Traditional Latin Mass, as well as where and when, with the local bishop. While any priest can celebrate the older form of the Mass “privately,” the local bishop has some authority to decide what is a private and what is a public Mass. These are the kinds of questions that belong to a bishop who is to “moderate” the celebration of Mass.

Thankfully, most of our bishops have been generous in applying the norms that permit a place for the older Latin form of the Mass. Most have pastorally accepted that this older form of the Mass has born fruits and has a place in their diocese. One might describe their general response as one of regulation of the Latin Mass, not restriction.

Communion for divorced persons

Question: Should a priest give holy Communion to a divorced person (who has not had an annulment) and that person is remarried? For context, the priest is totally aware of the situation.

– **Ron Duplain**, Ohio

Answer: No. Canon Law and Church teaching remain clear that holy Communion is not to be offered in such circumstances. Such cases must be referred to the tribunal of the diocese where the couple resides, and procedures must be followed. No priest on his own can resolve such matters or intentionally overlook them.

That said, we must all realize that not all people are divorced and remarried in the same way. Some were not Catholic when they divorced and remarried and later converted to the Faith. Others may have fallen away from the Faith and entered in one or more marriages prior to their current marriage and then return to the Faith. There may also be others who regard marriage casually and seem little interested in what God or

the Church teaches. Thus, when the Church encounters people in second marriages or other forms of invalid marriage, each situation must be assessed on the merits and facts of each case. Questions arise such as: What did the person know about Christian marriage? Were they mature enough to make lifelong decisions? Did they understand that marriage was a lifelong commitment focused on the procreation of children? Were they pressured to marry by family or circumstances such as poverty or crises in their family of origin, etc?

This is why the Church must investigate every situation with pastoral care and seek to find a solution that balances the true nature of marriage as a lasting obligation, but which also recognizes the desire of the divorced to seek access to the sacraments and the blessings of Church marriages.

The priest you describe ought not make such judgments on his own. Rather, he should commend couples in such situations to the assessment of the tribunal who can work for a pastoral solution based in truth and under the authority of the bishop.

Msgr. Charles Pope is the pastor of Holy Comforter-St. Cyprian in Washington, D.C., and writes for the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C. at blog.adw.org. Send questions to msgrpope@osv.com.