



The *Motu Proprio*: Liturgical Peace or the Crossing of Swords?

August 2007

Dear Friends of Clear Creek Monastery,

There seem to have been two fundamental reactions to the recent Apostolic Letter by *Motu Proprio*, of his Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, *Summorum Pontificum*. For some it represents a mere paternal gesture in favor of a small minority of Catholics lingering on in a past age; for others it appears as a major act of the *Magisterium* that will have the most far-reaching effects on the entire Church. I must say that the monks of Our Lady of Clear Creek belong wholeheartedly to the second way of thinking.

A long time before being raised to the Supreme Pontificate, Cardinal Ratzinger recognized the appropriateness of a return to the older form of the Roman Missal, but he did not think this would be possible. In 2003 he wrote to a certain Professor Barth: “There remains in many Catholics — after years of indoctrination — too strong an aversion for the traditional liturgy, which they refer to in a derogatory manner as ‘pre-conciliar’; also, many bishops would offer a determined opposition to a general authorization [of the old Roman Missal]” (quoted in the French magazine, *Aletheia*, of July 7, 2007). It seems that Pope Benedict XVI has experienced first-hand this “determined opposition” these past few months. But the Holy Spirit has given him the strength to overcome this opposition and move beyond it.

In issuing his *Motu Proprio*, the Holy Father means to restore to the liturgy the sacred character that befits the holy mystery being celebrated. He knows that by giving a place of honor to the Roman Missal of Saint Pius V (in its slightly modified edition of 1962), by recognizing it once again as a normal part of the Roman Catholic liturgy, not only does he thereby respond to the desire of the faithful who have an authentic and legitimate love for this form of worship, but also acknowledges the beneficial influence that the older Roman Missal will exercise on celebrations according to the one promulgated by Pope Paul VI. He has stated that, likewise, certain elements of the Roman Missal of 1969 can enhance that of St. Pius V. This is what we have been practicing since 1989, incorporating into the older rite some of the new prefaces, for example, and celebrating the feasts of Saints who are new to the calendar.

The debate concerning “the two Missals” has been a long and a deep one. Many feel — quite legitimately — that with *Summorum Pontificum* their respectful requests, their informed expressions of concern, and their urgent pleas have been at last vindicated. Should we cry “victory”? Whatever sentiments may rise from the hearts of the Catholic faithful on the occasion of this momentous document, it is clear that the primary concern of the monks of St. Benedict should be the good of souls and the peace of the Church. The motto most often attributed to the Order of Saint Benedict is precisely that, “Pax”, that is to say “Peace”. For us this is not a vain word.

As part of the *Liturgical Conference* held at Fontgombault Abbey (our “Mother-house”) in July of 2001, during which the whole problem of a possible return to the missal of Saint Pius V was discussed by liturgists from all over Europe and America, Cardinal Ratzinger delivered a discourse in which he thanked Father Abbot and the monks especially for “the spirit within this monastery,

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which has inspired us with the peace of the Church, the peace of the Lord. . .” If for some the discussion may have been about finding arguments to annihilate their adversaries, for Cardinal Ratzinger then, and now for Pope Benedict XVI, there was and is a higher aim.

For the Vicar of Christ and for those who wish to help him promote the cause of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, it is not so much about combating errors in themselves as about the good of souls, and above all, the glory of God. In other words, beyond the level of human controversy — however exalted and necessary — there is the purely supernatural vantage point, which must not be forgotten. Pope Benedict XVI seems to think that the sons of St. Benedict have a particular role to play in this regard.

The only Saint specifically named in the *Motu Proprio*, excepting certain Popes, is precisely Saint Benedict. “[Pope St. Gregory the Great] took great concern to ensure the dissemination of monks and nuns, who, following the Rule of St. Benedict, together with the announcement of the Gospel illustrated with their lives the wise provision of their Rule that ‘nothing should be placed before the work of God.’ In this way the sacred liturgy, celebrated according to the Roman use, enriched not only the faith and piety but also the culture of many peoples.”

Saint Augustine famously defined peace as “*tranquillitas ordinis*, the tranquility of order”. This is not the false peace of which the Prophet Ezechiel speaks in reference to the “foolish prophets that follow their own spirit”, who deceived the people “saying: Peace, and there is no peace. . .” (13:3;10), but rather the stable order of a Christian culture and civilization, a City of God, radiating from the Holy Liturgy, especially from the Sacrifice of the Mass. What better way to bring true peace to the world and to souls than through the authentic celebration of the *Ordo Missae*, of the Order of Holy Mass, according to the authentic dictates of the Church? This is what is at stake in the Catholic moment that opens now before us, after Pope Benedict’s Apostolic Letter by *Motu Proprio, Summorum Pontificum*.

I would like to conclude these brief comments by citing part of the message that our dear Abbot, Dom Antoine Forgeot of Fontgombault, addressed to the Holy Father on July 11, Feast of St. Benedict, on behalf of all his monastic family:

Your Holiness,

In the name of our community, which treasures the imperishable memory of Your visit in July of 2001, I wish to express to You our gratitude for the *Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum*, which You have just bestowed upon the Church. . . Thank you, Your Holiness, for this act of pastoral charity, which has required of You, no doubt, much courage and suffering. While there came to us rumors of the agitation produced by the news of Your intention to publish this document, we were silently praying with You and for You. Thanks to You the Holy Liturgy will be more beautiful and more worthy of the mystery which it celebrates. In our humble place, we want to do all we can to make this happen, and we desire to bring about the unity of all in humility, peace and charity, imitating the example You give in every circumstance. Bowed down to receive Your Paternal Benediction which I implore, for us all, I ask you to accept, Most Holy Father, the humble and faithful affection of Your sons of Fontgombault and of their Abbot.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Br. Philip Anderson, Prior". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

br. Philip Anderson, Prior of Clear Creek