

ZE12103004 - 2012-10-30

Permalink: <http://www.zenit.org/article-35845?l=english>

Interrupting the Mass

And More on Vestments in Hot Climates

ROME, OCT. 30, 2012 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Answered by Legionary of Christ Father Edward McNamara, professor of liturgy at the Regina Apostolorum university.

Q: My parish is conducting a parish mission which includes nightly home visits and culminates in a group Mass where the missionaries (all the priests) break off with the participants after the homily for discussions and return 45 minutes later to continue with the Mass. As not all who attended the Mass -- that is, the choir, the wardens, the altar boys, the lectors, etc. -- are participants, during the 45-minute break, the choir started practicing, the wardens wandered around socializing, the altar boys played, the lectors sent text messages. I have checked with various priests and was told that, though the break is not liturgically correct, the pastor has the final say. Is this correct? -- W.T., Singapore

A: There are two questions involved. First: Is this practice correct? Second: Can the pastor have the final say on such matters?

To the first question I think that the 2004 instruction, Redemptionis Sacramentum, gives a very clear answer:

"60. In the celebration of Mass, the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist are intimately connected to one another, and form one single act of worship. For this reason it is not licit to separate one of these parts from the other and celebrate them at different times or places. Nor is it licit to carry out the individual parts of Holy Mass at different times of the same day."

In the case presented by our reader the unity of the Mass as a single act of worship is interrupted by leaving for discussions and therefore goes against the norms.

This is not the same as the legitimate possibility of separating young children from the assembly at the moment of the homily so as to preach to them in a way tailored to their special needs. The children return to the assembly for the offertory.

Regarding the question as to whether a pastor may make such changes: Once again, Redemptoris Sacramentum can help us on this point when speaking of the regulation of the sacred liturgy:

"14. 'The regulation of the Sacred Liturgy depends solely on the authority of the Church, which rests specifically with the Apostolic See and, according to the norms of law, with the Bishop.'

"21. It pertains to the diocesan Bishop, then, 'within the limits of his competence, to set forth liturgical norms in his Diocese, by which all are bound.' Still, the Bishop must take care not to allow the removal of that liberty foreseen by the norms of the liturgical books so that the celebration may be adapted in an intelligent manner to the Church building, or to the group of the faithful who are present, or to particular pastoral circumstances in such a way that the universal sacred rite is truly accommodated to human understanding.

ZENIT

"22. The Bishop governs the particular Church entrusted to him, and it is his task to regulate, to direct, to encourage, and sometimes also to reprove; this is a sacred task that he has received through episcopal Ordination, which he fulfills in order to build up his flock in truth and holiness. He should elucidate the inherent meaning of the rites and the liturgical texts, and nourish the spirit of the Liturgy in the Priests, Deacons and lay faithful so that they are all led to the active and fruitful celebration of the Eucharist, and in like manner he should take care to ensure that the whole body of the Church is able to grow in the same understanding, in the unity of charity, in the diocese, in the nation and in the world.

"24. It is the right of the Christian people themselves that their diocesan Bishop should take care to prevent the occurrence of abuses in ecclesiastical discipline, especially as regards the ministry of the word, the celebration of the sacraments and sacramentals, the worship of God and devotion to the Saints.

"32. 'Let the Parish Priest strive so that the Most Holy Eucharist will be the center of the parish congregation of the faithful; let him work to ensure that Christ's faithful are nourished through the devout celebration of the Sacraments, and in particular, that they frequently approach the Most Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance; let him strive, furthermore, to ensure that the faithful are encouraged to offer prayers in their families as well, and to participate consciously and actively in the Sacred Liturgy, which the Parish Priest, under the authority of the diocesan Bishop, is bound to regulate and supervise in his parish lest abuses occur.' Although it is appropriate that he should be assisted in the effective preparation of the liturgical celebrations by various members of Christ's faithful, he nevertheless must not cede to them in any way those things that are proper to his own office."

To this we may add the injunction from the conciliar document *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, No. 22: "Therefore, absolutely no other person, not even a priest, may add, remove or change anything in the liturgy on his own authority."

Therefore I think it is fairly clear that the Church does not grant such sweeping powers to pastors -- certainly not to have the "final say" on a practice that has been specifically and definitively reprobated by the Holy See.

* * *

Follow-up: Vestments in Hot Climates

Some readers commented on the use of proper vestments in hot climates (see the column published [Oct. 18](#)). A priest in Tokyo wrote: "Here in Japan unfortunately they celebrate daily Mass with only an alb and stole, though on Sundays they do wear the chasuble. On the other hand the Buddhists' priest always wear heavy vestments whenever they engage in their ceremonies and even wear these garments in public while traveling to and fro for ceremonies. If I had a choice, I would always wear the chasuble."

Actually, Father, you do have a choice. Unless the Japanese bishops' conference has requested and obtained permission from the Holy See to celebrate without a chasuble, the use of full vestments remains the rule. The omission of the chasuble, except in the case of concelebrants other than the principal celebrant, is a contravention of liturgical law. We dealt with this in earlier columns on [Jan. 24](#) and [Feb. 7, 2006](#).

Even if such a permission were to exist, it would always be an option not an obligation.

Since liturgical law falls under the aegis of the bishops; a religious superior or the practice of a religious community could not command otherwise. Nor could a superior deprive any priest from exercising his rights to follow liturgical law.

ZENIT

Another reader commented, "It seems that custom has now eliminated the cassock under the alb for Mass or at least made it optional."

Although the use of the cassock for ministerial acts is still recommended and even mandated in some countries, it is unfortunately falling by the wayside since many priests rarely, if ever, use the cassock. In fact, in many places the use of cassock and surplice for some sacraments and sacramentals has been replaced by a generalized use of the alb for all occasions.

It is understandable, however, that it be omitted in areas of high temperatures and humidity. At times the dignity of the celebration and the conservation of delicate vestments require a priest to avoid excessive perspiration.

At the same time it is somewhat ironic that it is precisely in areas such as South India and Sri Lanka, whose climates would amply justify leaving aside the cassock, that most priests will wear a white cassock at all times and for all pastoral activities.

* * *

Readers may send questions to liturgy@zenit.org. Please put the word "Liturgy" in the subject field. The text should include your initials, your city and your state, province or country. Father McNamara can only answer a small selection of the great number of questions that arrive.

| [More](#)

© Innovative Media, Inc.

Reprinting ZENIT's articles requires written permission from the [editor](#).