

Questions commonly asked about the traditional Latin Mass

Why do some women cover their heads at Latin Masses?

St Paul, in one of his epistles, states that women should cover their heads in Church.

The reason for this is not one of subjugation of women, it goes back to biblical times when a woman would wear a veil as a sign of purity and modesty.

Over the years (and for many hundreds of years) this has changed so that the woman would cover her hair (described in the bible as 'the glory of a woman') as an act of humility and sacrifice to Almighty God. It is, in effect, a statement that the woman's 'glory' is less than that of God's and so she keeps it covered.

It is not compulsory to wear a mantilla, hat or scarf but it is customary at Extraordinary Form Masses and there is no reason why the practice should not be adopted at Ordinary Form Masses.

Of course, the reverse is true for men who should, at all Masses and at all times in Church, keep their heads bare.

Why does the priest have his back to the congregation at Extraordinary Form Masses?

We believe that, when Christ comes again, He will come from the East. In all older Churches, therefore, the altar is arranged at the east end of the Church. The tabernacle, which contains the Blessed Sacrament, is normally located at the head of the altar and so the priest faces the physical presence of God throughout the Mass.

The role of the priest at Mass is that of an intercessor, someone who is pleading to God on our behalf and who then is the instrument of God in offering up the unbloody sacrifice of His only Son at the consecration.

It is logical, therefore, to face the person (in this case, Almighty God) to whom you are both addressing and making an offering.

Why is it so quiet at Extraordinary Form Masses?

Normally, only the altar server makes the responses (although in some Churches it is customary for the congregation to make the responses;

this is called the Dialogue Mass. The case for the server only making the responses is that it is difficult for the congregation to make them without it sounding uncoordinated.

The result is a profoundly quiet Mass; this gives the individual a chance to either follow the Mass in their missal where the English translation is alongside that of the Latin, or, to immerse themselves in meditation or private prayer. The Holy Father says that it is also permissible to say the rosary during Mass provided that it is said with the intention of being part of the Mass.

The Extraordinary Form Mass can be hard to become accustomed to (and to follow) but it has a reverence all of its own; what Frater Faber famously described as “the most beautiful thing this side of Heaven”. It also has the advantage of being celebrated by priests of any nationality, anywhere in the world, and still be understood by the Faithful – a symbol of Catholic universality.

Why is Holy Communion received on the tongue and kneeling at Extraordinary Form masses?

Because until recently it was a rule of Latin Masses that this should be the case. This rule has been relaxed but it is very clear that the Holy Father has adopted reception on the tongue as preferable to by hand. Now many Bishops and Cardinals around the world are making this a rule and there is a return to this devout way of receiving the Holy Eucharist. At Ordinary Form Masses it is still acceptable to receive standing but there have been many cases of sacrilege regarding the Blessed Sacrament over the past few years and there is now a definite move to the safer practice of receiving on the tongue.

If you wish to receive by hand at Ordinary Form Masses you should either genuflect or bow reverently before receiving in the right hand with the left placed under it so that both hands form a cross; you should place the host in your mouth before turning away.