

The "private" Mass, a specificity of the Latin Church.

The "private" celebration of Mass in the Roman rite from its origins to the 13th century

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1. Introduction

The "private" Mass is a specific feature of the Latin Church; it is not present in Eastern liturgies, and when it is, we see that it has appeared recently, on the occasion of renewed relations with the Roman Church.

Let us clarify from the outset that what we mean here by "private" is a Mass formally celebrated for its own sake, without regard to the physical presence of ministers or a group of faithful. "These may or may not be present, individually or as a group, but their presence is neither required nor indispensable to the celebration. [...] The 'missa privata' is in this sense [i.e. formally speaking] a 'missa solitaria', although it often differs from it in material terms.² Indeed, while a solitary Mass is necessarily 'private', a 'private' Mass is not always solitary.

It is also worth recalling here the ontologically public nature of the Mass. Indeed, as Pius XII taught, the "Eucharistic sacrifice, everywhere and always, necessarily and by its very nature, has a public and social role."³ This is why we use quotation marks for the adjective "private" when describing the Mass.

The adjective "private" therefore does not describe the intrinsic nature of the Mass, but the manner in which it is celebrated.

That being said, it should be borne in mind that the expression "private Mass" has prevailed throughout the history of the Church and that it reflects a tradition dating back several centuries.⁴ We find it, for example, in the *Cluniac Customs* of Ulrich, Abbot of Cluny, in the second half of

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² C. Vogel, "An unexplained cultural shift: the transition from communal Eucharist to private Mass," in *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 54 (1980), 234.

³ Pius XII (20 November 1947) Encyclical Letter *Mediator Dei*: "Documentation Catholique" 45, 222. Here is the complete passage: "This sacrifice [the Eucharistic sacrifice], everywhere and always, necessarily and by its very nature, has a public and social role, since the one who offers it acts in the name of Christ and of Christians, whose divine Redeemer is the head, offering it to God for the holy Catholic Church, for the living and the dead (*Missale Romanum*, Canon Missae)."

And also: "The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is an act of public worship, rendered to God in the name of Christ and the Church, regardless of the place and manner of celebration. The expression 'private Mass' should therefore be avoided" (Sacred Congregation of Rites (3 September 1958) Instruction *De Musica Sacra* 2: DC 55, 1429).

⁴ Cf. V. Raffa, *Liturgia eucaristica. Mistagogia della Messa: dalla storia e dalla teologia alla pastorale pratica*, (Rome, (2003), 872.

the¹¹th century.⁵ Finally, it has been retained in the various editions of *the Missale Romanum*, from 1570 to 1960, with a fluctuating meaning: sometimes the "missa privata" (or "privatim celebrata") refers to a low Mass, as opposed to a solemn or sung Mass⁶ ; sometimes it referred to a Mass where no one would respond or serve, as opposed to a public Mass⁷ ; sometimes it referred to the Mass celebrated individually by priests attached to a collegiate church, as opposed to the main Mass of a community (the parish or conventual Mass).⁸

These last two cases are clearly examples of a "private" Mass. The first, on the other hand, is at least a "private" Mass, but without any guarantee that it is purely "private"; to know this, we would need to know the celebrant's internal forum: only the context can help us to know this, or at least to suppose it. This is often where the difficulty lies for the historian of liturgy in identifying a "private" Mass among the multitude of ecclesiastical writings and disciplinary decrees at his disposal.

The best clue for them is the Mass "devoid of solemnity", since this is most often – if not almost always – the ritual form of the "private" Mass. Once such a ceremony has been identified, it is its context that will reveal whether it can be considered with certainty or with a certain probability as a formally "private" Mass.

Historically, the "private" Mass is attested beyond doubt in the¹³th century. In the Franciscan missal *Regula* – published around 1230 and inherited almost word for word from the now lost missal of Honorius III (1216-1227) – we find the following entry: "Sed si sunt plures sacerdotes in loco, secrete possunt cantare missam quam volunt."⁹ Then, in 1243, an *ordo missæ* was devoted for the first time solely to the materially "private" Mass: this was *the Ordo Indutus planeta*, written by the Franciscan general Aymon de Faversham.¹⁰ This latter document marks a turning point in the history of the liturgy: for the first time, the "private" Mass – which can safely be considered the most common ritual form of the "private" Mass – became the norm for the Eucharistic liturgy, to the detriment of the solemn public liturgy, which then appeared to be the result of additions to the basic model. This ceremony would also be the direct ancestor of *the Ritus servandus in celebratione Missæ* of the 1570 missal.

Paradoxically, only a few years before the publication of the *Regula* missal in 1226, St Francis of Assisi strongly recommended to his brothers that, if several priests were in the same place, only

⁵ Cf. Udalricus Cluniacensis *Antiquiores Consuetudines Cluniacensis Monasterii* 2, 30: PL 149, 719A.

⁶ Cf. M. Sodi – A.M. Triacca eds., *Missale Romanum, Editio Princeps (1570)* (Città del Vaticano, 1998), 8*. 33*.

⁷ Cf. *Ibid.* 23*. 25*. 29*.

⁸ See *Ibid.* 8*. 34*. This scenario of a "private" Mass is in direct opposition to sacramental concelebration, which was still unknown in *the Tridentine Missale Romanum*.

⁹ M. Przewcowski [edr], *Missale Franciscanum Regulæ (Codicis VI.G.38 Bibliothecæ Nationalis Neapolinensis)*, (Città del Vaticano, (2003), p. 37.

¹⁰ Its full name is *Ordo agendorum et dicendorum a sacerdote in missa privata et feriali iuxta consuetudinem ecclesie romane*.

one Mass should be celebrated per day, which all would attend.¹¹ The "private" Mass was therefore clearly and firmly discouraged by the holy founder to his brother priests, in order to promote the bonds of charity.

Was the "private" celebration of Mass therefore a novelty that appeared in the 13th century? Was its appearance in communities of priests the cause of a cooling of charity?

The aim of these lines is to show how deeply rooted the "private" Mass is in the Roman liturgical tradition. We believe that an overview of the history of its existence, followed by its ritual form, will suffice to demonstrate its organic development, as Alcuin Reid has established the criteria: slow, gradual growth, controlled – though not imposed – by authority.¹²

2. Its existence

As the Acts of the Apostles testify, Mass – then referred to as the "breaking of bread" – was celebrated from apostolic times onwards in private homes, which were the only places of public worship at that time. It was celebrated on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7) and sometimes even every day in Jerusalem, as seems to be indicated by the description of the life of the early Christians in that city (Acts 2:46).

It therefore appears that, for the early Christians, Mass was more than a simple act of devotion: from the beginning, it was considered the centre of all Christian life.

In this logic, although there is no scriptural evidence, it does not seem absurd to suppose that St Paul and the early missionaries who accompanied him celebrated the "breaking of bread" in private when they stayed for a while in places where the natives, not (yet) converted to the Christian faith, did not attend the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice.¹³

Finally, more generally, it seems reasonable to us to agree with Jungmann that there is strong evidence for the existence of a "private" celebration during the week, dating back to apostolic times.¹⁴ Although we lack explicit evidence, there are no compelling objections to contradict this possibility.

¹¹ Cf. Francis of Assisi, *Epistola toti ordini missa una cum oratione: omnipotens, aeterna*, 30-31: Th. Desbonnets [edr] (1981) *Ecrits*, (SCh 285) (Paris, 2003), 250-251. We read: "ut in locis, in quibus fratres morantur, una tantum missa celebretur in die secundum formam sanctae Ecclesiae. Si vero plures in loco fuerint sacerdotes, sit per amorem caritatis alter contentus auditu celebrationis alterius sacerdotis." Quotation found in: G. Derville, *La concélébration eucharistique. Du symbole à la réalité* (Montreal, 2011), 15, note 38.

¹² Cf. A. Reid, *The Organic Development of the Liturgy. The Principles of Liturgical Reform and Their Relation to the Twentieth-century Liturgical Movement Prior to the Second Vatican Council* (San Francisco 2005), pp. 307-308.

¹³ See S.J.P. Van Dijk – J.H. Walker, *The Origins of the Modern Roman Liturgy. The Liturgy of the Papal Court and the Franciscan Order in the Thirteenth Century* (London, 1960), p. 45, note 2. The following cases are also cited: Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey; Paul, Timothy and Silas in Thessalonica; Paul alone in Athens (cf. Acts 13-14 and Acts 17). The same thesis is put forward by Righetti. M. Righetti, *Manuale di Storia Liturgica*, III: *La Messa. Commento storico-liturgico alla luce del concilio Vaticano II* (Ancora, Milan 2005), p. 148.

¹⁴ "Since, in the beginning, public celebrations bringing the community together were only planned for Sundays and feast days, it could easily have resulted in the bishop or priest himself offering a sacrifice in his own name on the days in between, driven by a desire for personal thanksgiving and prayer. (J.A. Jungmann, *Missarum Sollemnia. Genetic Explanation of the Roman Mass. Volume One, Translation revised and updated from the 3rd German edition* (Paris, 1956), pp. 266-267).

The persecutions of the early centuries also encouraged celebrations attended by small groups of the faithful. Various sources show us that Masses were celebrated for small groups, on weekdays and Sundays, in secret places or even in prisons.¹⁵ Due to the harassment imposed by persecution, the local community was far from being present in its entirety. However, even in this case, the priest said Mass, because he saw the whole Church in this small congregation.¹⁶ This did not mean, at least in most cases, that these were strictly 'private' Masses, but it is certain that this kind of situation necessarily limited the external ceremonial of the celebrations, which were therefore often 'devoid of solemnity'.

Subsequently, the religious peace introduced by the Edict of Milan in 313 gave Christians official places of worship, but it did not lead to the disappearance of these special masses for small groups of worshippers. On the contrary, they continued to multiply on the fringes of official assemblies, to such an extent that the authorities were forced to legislate on the matter: it was at the beginning of the 6th century that the ban on celebrations in private homes, outside official places of worship (*extra parochias*¹⁷, *in villa*¹⁸), appeared on feast days. This proves that these private masses were growing in number, especially in Gaul. It should be noted that it is not the "private" mass as such that is targeted by these disciplinary decrees¹⁹, but rather the fact that Christians are turning away from the official public services of the local Church, celebrated by the bishop or his delegates.²⁰

Why did these private Masses persist, despite the transition from the *domus ecclesiae* to the basilica? In our opinion, it was mainly because of

- Christians' attachment to votive Masses.²¹

Among many others, let us mention here the anecdote reported by Saint Augustine: one of his priests celebrated Mass in the home of a Roman officer whose servants and livestock were suffering

¹⁵ Saint Augustine attests that Christians celebrated Mass in prison during times of persecution (cf. Augustinus *Breviculus collationis cum donatistis* III, 17, 33: PL 43, 644).

¹⁶ For example, Tertullian mentions the case of Sunday celebrations during times of persecution. When asked how to proceed, he replies that if it is not possible to gather the community during the day, it is still possible to celebrate at night, and that if it is not possible to gather all the brothers, the Eucharist must be celebrated even if only three people are present; the Church is then represented by these three ("sit tibi et in tribus Ecclesia"). Tertullian concludes by stating that it is better for the priest not to see his faithful sometimes than to compromise them: "melius est turbas tuas aliquando non videas, quam addicas" (Tertullianus *De fuga in persecutione* XIV: PL 2, 120).

¹⁷ Canon 21 of the Council of Aede (506): Mansi 8, 328.

¹⁸ Canon 25 of the Council of Orleans (511): MGH Conc. I, 8.

¹⁹ Especially since these domestic Masses, although "devoid of solemnity", were not necessarily "private".

²⁰ See C. Vogel, "Une mutation culturelle inexplicée : le passage de l'eucharistie communautaire à la messe privée" (An unexplained cultural shift: the transition from communal Eucharist to private Mass), in RSR 54 (1980), p. 235. The subsequent history of canon law shows that the authorities have always urged the faithful to attend cathedral or parish Masses on Sundays.

²¹ From the Latin *votum*, meaning "wish," these Masses are celebrated to obtain spiritual or temporal goods, whether public or private. We have numerous accounts of this; they often take place in the very place where the special grace is sought: for example, in the home of the sick person whose recovery is hoped for, or at the grave of the deceased for whom eternal rest is sought.

demonic harassment, with the intention of asking for an end to these torments; at the end of this votive Mass, everything ceased.²²

- combined with the rise of the cult of relics

Inherited from ancient pagan funeral banquets, which were held near or even on top of tombs, the practice spread – at a time when Christians were granted freedom of worship – of building shrines above the tombs of martyrs (*martyria*).²³ From then on, it is clear that "veneration of the sanctuary, relics and celebration of the *memoria passionis domini* form a whole" in the minds of Christians of that time.²⁴ Numerous accounts show us the popularity of pilgrimages to *martyria*.

It is therefore not surprising to find in the Sacramentary of Verona numerous Mass forms intended for celebrating in honour of the martyrs.²⁵ Some *libelli* (in April, in section VIII) are even "without indication of names"²⁶ ; the priest therefore had at his disposal this kind of "Common of Martyrs" ahead of its time, applicable to any altar.

Under these circumstances, the presence of pilgrims attending the celebration – while remaining a very important reason for celebrating Mass – could nevertheless remain secondary to the honour given to the Lord through his martyrs. Thus, the rise of the cult of relics would, in the long term, be a significant cause of the emergence and development of the celebration of Mass "for its own sake", namely "private" Mass.

One of the consequences of this was the proliferation of secondary places of worship: shrines, oratories and even – probably from the time of Pope Symmachus (†514) and attested to in increasing numbers during the 6th century – secondary altars built in churches.²⁷

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²² Cf. Augustinus *De Civitate Dei* XXII, 8, 6: PL 41, 764.

²³ See A.A. Häussling, *Ursprünge der Privatmesse: Stimmen der Zeit* (1965), pp. 176, 24. We do not always agree with this author's theological conclusions, but we will cite only his historical observations. Already in the time of Saint Cyprian of Carthage (†258), Christians celebrated the torments of the martyrs and their feast days, that is, the anniversary of their martyrdom, with sacrifices (cf. Cyprianus Carthaginensis *Epistola XXXIV*, 3: PL 4, 323A).

²⁴ A.A. Häussling *Ursprünge* 24.

²⁵ Cf. C. Vogel, *Introduction aux sources de l'histoire du culte chrétien au Moyen-Age*, Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo (Spoleto, 1966), pp. 40-42. It should be noted here that the Sacramentary of Verona, as a collection, is commonly dated to the 6th century (cf. C. Vogel, *Introduction* 33), but that some forms may date from the middle of the 5th century (cf. C. Vogel, *Introduction* 39).

²⁶ See C. Vogel *Introduction* 40.

²⁷ See O. Nussbaum, *Kloster, Priestermonch und Privatmesse*, Peter Hanstein (Bonn, 1961), 186, and J. Braun, *Der christliche Altar in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, I: *Arten, Bestandteile, Altargrab, Weihe, Symbolik* (Munich, 1924), p. 369. The original custom, still preserved among Eastern Christians, was to build only one altar per church (cf. J. Braun *Arten* 373).

Taking advantage of these favourable circumstances, compounded by the increase in the number of priests without specific pastoral duties²⁸, the "private" Mass experienced considerable growth between the 7th and 11th centuries, particularly under the impetus of the Carolingian reform and in monastic circles. There is abundant evidence of this in ecclesiastical documents.

Of particular note is *the Ordo Romanus XV*, which clearly and irrefutably attests to the existence of the "private" Mass. This purely ceremonial liturgical book, which was compiled in a monastic setting between 750 and 775²⁹ and is addressed to all clergy, both regular and secular³⁰, refers in particular to the different scenarios for celebration, among which it explicitly mentions that of solitary Mass (which is undoubtedly a "private" Mass³¹). There is therefore no doubt that this type of celebration was already sufficiently well known and widespread in Frankish lands in the third quarter of the 8th century to be officially recognised.

The consequences of this growth are clearly visible. These include the exponential increase in the number of secondary altars in abbey and collegiate churches, as well as the gradual formation of the plenary missal.

Let us pause for a moment to consider the appearance of this type of missal in the 9th century and its gradual development, which led to it replacing the sacramentary in the 12th century.³² The celebration of "private" Mass appeared well before the plenary missal; at that time, it was probably celebrated using only the sacramentary. Then came the gradual obligation on the celebrant, initiated according to our sources by *the Ordo romanus XV*, not to omit the recitation of the parts performed during solemn Masses by the cantors and sacred ministers. The celebrant was therefore no longer required to celebrate with the sacramentary alone, but also with a lectionary and an antiphony. This is why it became urgent – for reasons of both ritual integrity and practical convenience – to design a euchological book containing all these parts of the Mass; this was the plenary missal.³³

²⁸ At the synod held in Rome in 610, Pope Boniface IV declared himself in favour of the priestly ordination of monks (cf. MANSI 10, 504-505). Until then, the disciples of St. Benedict had been content with their status as monks. In most cases, there were only a few priests in each monastery – sometimes only one – who celebrated Mass for the community (cf. P. Delatte, *Commentaire sur la Règle de saint Benoît [Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict]* (Solesmes 1985), p. 484 (on chapter 62 of the Rule of Saint Benedict: "Priests of the monastery"). We then see that between the 8th and 10th centuries, the proportion of monk-priests in relation to monk-lay brothers increased significantly in the monasteries of France and Germany, rising from an average of 26% around the year 800 to an average of 55% a century and a half later (see statistics provided by Nussbaum (*Kloster* 78-80).

²⁹ M. Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani du Haut Moyen-Age. III: Les textes (suite) (Ordines XIV-XXXIV)*, (Louvain, 1951), pp. 18-20.

³⁰ See C. Vogel, *Introduction* 143.

³¹ At no. 121: "Hoc tamen sciendum est [...] in cenubiis, sive in civitatibus, [...] or wherever the priest celebrates Mass, whether on Sundays or weekdays, or on other solemnities of saints and martyrs, whether with the clergy publicly, or even with two or one minister, or even if he offers the sacrifice to God individually, he must observe [...]" (*Ordo romanus XV*, 121: M. Andrieu *Les Ordines* III, 120). And in n. 123: "And thus, bowing towards the altar to the east, they adorn it, saying *Kyrie eleison* nine times in unison. If there is only one priest, he bows nine times and says *Kyrie eleison* while adorning the altar" (*Ordo romanus XV*, 123: M. Andrieu *Les Ordines* III, 121). The bold type is ours.

³² Cf. C. Vogel *Introduction* 87-88.

³³ Among the four most widely accepted theories explaining the origin of the plenary missal, Dom Folsom sets out the one we have just described (C. Folsom (1998) *I libri liturgici romani*: A.J. Chupungco [edr], *Scientia liturgica. Manuale di liturgia*. I: *Introduzione alla liturgia*, (Casale Monferrato, 1998), p. 285.

Conversely, the evolution of liturgical books will, as we shall see later, have an impact on the ritual form of the "private" Mass.

Furthermore, the rise of "private" celebrations made it necessary for the hierarchy to correct certain abuses, which inevitably arise when a phenomenon becomes widespread. In addition to the restrictions still imposed on domestic Masses, we should note here the case of multiple daily celebrations and solitary Masses.

- As early as the 8th century, in certain places, we find decrees recommending that priests celebrate only one Mass per day³⁴ ; this is not surprising when we consider that the number of daily celebrations by a single priest could reach twenty or thirty in some cases. It was not until Alexander II (†1073) that a universal prescription on this point was issued: binage was prohibited, except in cases of pastoral necessity for a Mass *pro defunctis*.³⁵
- As for solitary Mass, it was explicitly prohibited from the 9th century onwards³⁶ ; the reason given by the legislator was to manifest externally the social nature of Mass through the presence of at least one assistant who would respond and receive Communion. If the practice of solitary Mass was subsequently granted on an ad hoc basis to certain monks or hermits, it was, it seems, by special indult.³⁷ Let us add, however, that Saint Peter Damian (†1072), in his famous opusculum entitled *Dominus vobiscum*³⁸ , was keen to justify this practice of solitary Mass theologically. Here is the saintly doctor's main argument. The priest is a part of the body that is the Church³⁹ ; now the office of a single member of the body involves and concerns the whole body (as shown by the analogy with a human body, which is an organic whole)⁴⁰ ; moreover, the Church is both simple in a multiplicity of members (through the unity of faith) and whole in each of its members (through the bond of charity and the gifts of the Holy Spirit)⁴¹ . Consequently, the words of the priest at Mass (the priestly greetings, and possibly the responses) are spoken on behalf of the whole

³⁴ Thus Egbert, Bishop of York: "Et sufficit sacerdoti unam missam in una die celebrare, quia Christus semel passus est, et totum mundum redemit; in Levitico quoque scriptum est non debere Aaron ingredi assidue interius in sancta " (Egbertus Eboracensis Archiepiscopus *Excerptiones e dictis et canonibus sanctorum patrum concinnatae, et ad ecclesiasticae politiae institutionem conducentes* 54: PL 89, 386B).

³⁵ See *Decretum Gratiani* III, 1, 53: A.L. Richter – A. Friedberg. [edr], *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, I: *Decretum magistri gratiani*, (Graz, 1955), p. 1308.

³⁶ Notably with Theodulf of Orléans (†821) and the canons of the Councils of Mainz (813) and Paris (829).

³⁷ Cf. J. Bona, *De la liturgie, ou Traité sur le saint sacrifice de la messe (tome premier)* (Paris, 1874), p. 154; *Sacra Congregatio de Disciplina Sacramentorum* (1949) *Instructio Quam plurimum* III, 1-2: AAS 41, 506-507. There is also the famous case of Saint Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916) who, when he was living as a hermit in the Sahara desert, did not celebrate Mass – before receiving the much-desired indult from Rome – on the (many) days when he was alone.

³⁸ Cf. Petrus Damianus *Liber qui appellatur Dominus vobiscum ad Leonem eremitam*: PL 145, 231B-252B. Others followed him, notably Odo of Cambrai (†1113) and Stephen of Baugé, Bishop of Autun (†1136).

³⁹ See Petrus Damianus *Dominus vobiscum* 10: PL 145, 238D-239A.

⁴⁰ Cf. Petrus Damianus *Dominus vobiscum* 9: PL 145, 238C-238D.

⁴¹ Cf. Petrus Damianus *Dominus vobiscum* 5: PL 145, 235A-235C.

Church⁴² ; therefore, if the priest is alone, he can give the greetings in the plural and the corresponding responses.⁴³ Moreover, adds Peter Damian, if this were not the case, it is not clear why the priest, when alone, could also say the passages in the plural of the divine office, such as: "Venite, exsultemus Domino", "Venite adoremus", "Oremus", "Benedicamus Domino".⁴⁴

It should be noted that, although abuses were condemned by the hierarchy, "private" celebration itself was never prohibited at any time or in any region of Christendom. On the contrary, it appears officially in the monastic constitutions of the 11th century as a daily exercise for monks⁴⁵ .

Some wanted to classify the "private" Mass itself as an abuse and wished to return to the celebration of a single Mass per day in a given community of priests. This is particularly the case with the Friars Minor. We have already noted in the introduction that in 1226 St Francis prescribed that there should be only one Mass per day per house of brothers, celebrated by one of them and attended by any other priests in the community. It seems that it was particularly the lure of gain that the founder of Assisi wanted to avoid for his brothers⁴⁶ , but we can also see in this choice a desire to emphasise the communal aspect of Mass, given the particular importance the saint attached to the bond of charity. Moreover, the rest of the letter mentioned in the introduction says this: "If there were several priests in this place, let each priest, out of love for charity, be content to hear the celebration of the other."⁴⁷ Celebrating "in private" was clearly considered by him to be a failure to uphold this great virtue. The attendance of all the brothers, priests or not, at a single Mass at which all received Communion⁴⁸ , was the best way to effectively maintain the bond of charity among the brothers; and this was precisely the priority set by the saint of Assisi⁴⁹ .

⁴² See Petrus Damianus *Dominus vobiscum* 10: PL 145, 239A-240A.

⁴³ See Petrus Damianus *Dominus vobiscum* 13: PL 145, 241D-242C.

⁴⁴ See Petrus Damianus *Dominus vobiscum* 7: PL 145, 236C-237C.

⁴⁵ Of interest in this regard is the consultation of Cluniac monastic customs, particularly Dom Tirot's analysis in this article: P. Tirot, "Un Ordo Missæ monastique: Cluny, Cîteaux, La Chartreuse," in *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 95 (1981), pp. 44-120.220-251.

⁴⁶ Cf. S.J.P. Van Dijk – J.H. Walker *The Origins* 51-52. We have not been able to explore this question further.

⁴⁷ Quoted in: G. Derville, *La concélébration eucharistique. Du symbole à la réalité* (Montreal, 2011), p. 15.

⁴⁸ It is clear that for a brother priest, a "private" celebration can be compatible – with a little organisation – with attendance at community Mass. On the other hand, it prevents him from receiving Communion there. The same remark can be made for a brother who is not a priest and who serves at a "private" Mass. See in particular: R. Grégoire, "La communion des moines-prêtres à la messe d'après les coutumiers monastiques médiévaux" [*The Communion of Monk-Priests at Mass According to Medieval Monastic Customs*], in *Sacris Erudiri* . 18 (1967-1968), pp. 524-549, and more particularly the first point of the conclusion on page 547.

⁴⁹ This practice was also in force for cardinals during conclaves until 1922: a single Mass celebrated by one person, at which all attended and received Communion, without being able to celebrate "in private", let alone concelebrate sacramentally as we understand it today.

We know what happened next for the Order of Friars Minor: they nevertheless adopted in their missal the section cited in the introduction⁵⁰, inherited from the papal court, which explicitly legitimises "private" celebration. Thus, despite their founder's encouragement to give priority to communal Mass, the Friars Minor were given the freedom to celebrate "privately" if they wished. No doubt they did not make use of this possibility every day? In any case, a balance was eventually found, since around 1240, the General of the Order, Aymon de Faversham, compiled *the ordo missæ Indutus planeta*, which is a very detailed ceremonial for the "private" Mass and the conventual Mass on feast days. It seems that the itinerancy necessary for the mission, combined with the brothers' evangelical life of poverty, contributed to reducing the liturgical display and length of community ceremonies on the less solemn days of the year. This ceremonial is in fact a vademecum for celebrating Masses (communal or individual) "devoid of solemnity".

Thus, the legitimacy of the "private" celebration was confirmed, and its ritualistic practice spread from Rome throughout Christendom.

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To conclude this historical overview, let us note how, as is often the case, errors and abuses provide an opportunity for the Church to clarify its doctrine. In this instance, their appearance was an opportunity to reaffirm the intrinsically communal nature of all Eucharistic celebrations, even "private" ones.

It should also be noted that these disciplinary clarifications, which were essential to correct certain abusive practices, were only known within the Latin Church, suggesting that the Eastern Churches did not experience the evolution from the "private solemnity" Mass to the "private" Mass proper, as was the case in the West between the 4th and VI^e centuries.

Then, after the Gregorian Reform, the growing opposition – especially in monasteries – between public conventual Mass and "private" Mass provided an opportunity to finally establish the definitive legitimacy of the latter and its complementarity with the former.

3. Its ritual form

Here we present the results of research carried out using three sources: *the Ordo romanus XV*⁵¹, the Cluniac customs of the 11th century⁵², and *the Ordo missæ Indutus planeta*.⁵³

⁵⁰ "Si sunt plures sacerdotes in loco secrete possunt cantare missam quam volunt."

⁵¹ *Ordo Romanus XV*, 121–156: M. Andrieu *Les Ordines III*, 120–125. We have added the Gregorian sacramentary *Paduensis*: A. Catella – F. dell'Oro – A. Martini, *Liber Sacramentorum Paduensis* 375–383.

⁵² We studied four customary laws: Bernard's Cluniac customs (Bernardus *Ordo Cluniacensis* 72: M. Herrgott *Vetus disciplina monastica* 263-265), Ulrich's Cluniac customs (Udalricus Cluniacensis *Antiquiores Consuetudines Cluniacensis Monasterii* II, 30: PL 149, 724A-725A), the customs of Hirsau (Wilhelmus *Constitutiones Hirsaugienses* I, 86: PL 150, 1015C-1020C) and the customs of Farfa (Odilo Abbas *Liber tramitis aevi* II, 24: *Corpus Consuetudinum Monasticarum* 10, 232-233).

⁵³ It can be consulted here: S.J.P. Van Dijk [edr], *Sources of the Modern Roman Liturgy. The Ordinals by Haymo of Faversham and related documents (1243-1307)*, II: *Texts* (Leiden, 1963), 1-14.

These sources form a rather fortunate sequence: they are spread out over time and had a great influence in both time and space.

Here is a summary of the study of these sources, which shows us the evolution over time of the ritual of the "private" Mass.

N.B. The first two stages predate the sources studied. They have been conjectured from minor contemporary sources that we encountered while developing our first historical section.

a. Early centuries: from the origins to the end of the 4th century

For this period, we have conjectured that the "private" Mass was reduced to the pure *sacrificium*, according to the hypothesis formulated by Mr Righetti.⁵⁴

The following elements probably made up the "private" Mass:

- Preparation and offering of the oblates, probably accompanied by improvised prayers,
- Eucharistic Anaphora,
- Communion by the priest, and possibly by the assistants,
- Probably improvised prayers of thanksgiving.

No liturgical books from this period have survived. It is likely that the celebrant – at least until the 4th century – did not use any written texts to celebrate this Mass. The Eucharistic Anaphora, like all texts considered eminently sacred at that time, was probably known by heart.

b. From the end of the 4th century to the 7th century (the era of the first libelli and sacramentaries)

We continue with the initial hypothesis of a "private" celebration reduced to pure *sacrificium*, which will evolve organically over the centuries and according to the regions.⁵⁵ It will gradually be enriched with new elements, which were already present in the solemn public Mass but performed by other ministers (cantors, deacons, subdeacons). Not being accustomed to reciting them during public Mass, the celebrant began to do so during "private" Mass, with the intervention of the authorities.⁵⁶

The celebrant was equipped with a single book: a *libellus* or a sacramentary.

At the beginning of the 7th century, the order of the "private" Mass might have looked like this:

⁵⁴ See M. Righetti, *La Messa*, 148–149. The hypothesis is based primarily on common sense: deprived of the assistance of the faithful and the presence of several ministers, the celebrant – assuming the existence of Masses "devoid of solemnity" – reproduces in these celebrations the essence of the Mass rite (which he normally celebrates publicly), but omitting the parts that are specifically communal (such as psalmody, readings, and homily). Righetti bases this hypothesis on a passage from Tertullian in which he evokes the alternative between the offering of the (Eucharistic) sacrifice and the service of the Word of God: "aut sacrificium offertur, aut Dei verbum administratur" (Tertullianus *De cultu fœminarum* II, 11: PL 1, 1329B), one excluding the other, and vice versa. We must acknowledge that this written evidence is far from indisputable, but it does enjoy a certain degree of probability.

⁵⁵ We can identify five main regions of development of the Roman liturgy from around the year 375: Africa, Gaul, Spain, Italy (outside Rome) and Rome (cf. C. Vogel *Introduction* 20-30).

⁵⁶ This is the case for the *Sanctus*, which is explicitly required to be recited at "private" Masses (since it is recited at public Masses) by a canon of the Second Council of Vaison (529).

- *Kyrie*⁵⁷ , concluding with the collection.⁵⁸
- Offertory:
 - "Oremus",
 - offering of the oblates,
 - and oraison *super oblata*.⁵⁹
- Eucharistic Anaphora:
 - Dialogue and preface⁶⁰ ,
 - *Sanctus*,
 - Roman canon⁶¹ ,
 - *Pater*.
- Communion rites.
- Final prayer.

c. From the end of the 8th century (according to the Ordo Romanus XV and the Gregorian Sacramentary Paduensis)

We now leave the realm of probability and hypothesis to enter into considerations that are almost certain. With the help of *the Ordo Romanus XV*, we can provide the following details on the sequence of the "private" Mass⁶² :

- The introit (composed of an antiphon and psalm verses concluding with *Gloria Patri*).
- The *Kyrie* consists of nine invocations of "Kyrie eleison".
- The *Gloria in excelsis Deo* (on certain days).
- The collection is preceded by a greeting (probably "Dominus vobiscum").
- Epistle and Gospel (if a portable missal or lectionary is available).
- The *sacrificium* is unchanged, with the following exception:
 - the Roman canon is certainly the one we know (from *Te igitur* to *Per ipsum*), it is recited in a low voice,
 - the *Pater* is certainly followed by the embolism *Libera nos*.

⁵⁷ The *Kyrie* consists of simple invocations: "Kyrie eleison" and "Christe eleison". It is both a penitential rite, preparing the priest inwardly for the sacrifice that is to follow, and a prayer of intercession. Indeed, it is probably the heir to the *Deprecatio gelasiana*, which was itself a prayer of intercession, and its concluding prayer (the collect) is precisely the heir to the prayer concluding the *Deprecatio gelasiana*.

⁵⁸ The formula for the collect is given by the *libellus* or the sacramentary.

⁵⁹ The formula for the oration *super oblata* is given by the *libellus* or the sacramentary.

⁶⁰ The formula for the preface is given by the *libellus* or the sacramentary.

⁶¹ We know that at least the central part of the Roman canon was already in use in the Roman rite at the time of Ambrose of Milan. He quotes entire passages from it in his *De sacramentis*, in 390 (cf. Ambrose of Milan, *Des Sacrements*, B. Botte, ed., SCh 25 bis, Paris, 1961, pp. 114-116).

⁶² We have highlighted the additional elements compared to the previous step in bold.

- The rites of communion now certainly include:
 - the *Pax domini*,
 - the commixtion,
 - apologies,
 - Communion (consisting of an antiphon and psalm verses concluding with *Gloria Patri*)
- Conclusion unchanged, with the prayer *Ad complendum*, and possibly an additional prayer *Super populum*.

d. From the 11th century onwards (according to Cluniac monastic customs)

The customs analysed show that the "private" Mass was considerably enriched ritually between the 8th and 11th centuries, at least in the monasteries dependent on Cluny.

The only book used at the altar was now the missal, which occupied two places during Mass: on the right at the beginning and end, and on the left from the epistle until the ablutions.

A lay brother served Mass.

The volume of the voice is modest, even secret for certain parts.

Here are the main elements of the celebration revealed by these customs⁶³ :

- Washing of hands and preparation of the oblates (placement of the host on the paten and pouring of wine and water into the chalice) before Mass, in the sacristy.
- Setting up the altar upon arrival.
- Dressing at the altar.
- *Confiteor* by the priest and then the server, at the bottom of the altar steps.
- Washing of hands and brief prayer after ascending to the altar.
- *Introit, Kyrie, no Gloria*.
- "Dominus vobiscum" and collection (there may be several collections).
- Epistle then Gospel (introduced by "Sequentia...").
- *Credo* (for Sundays and feast days).
- Offertory:
 - "Dominus vobiscum",
 - placement of the corporal on the altar,
 - then of the oblates, brought by the server,
 - washing and then joining the first two fingers of each hand,
 - prayer *In spiritu humilitatis*,
 - exhortation to prayer *Orate pro me*,

⁶³ We have highlighted in bold any additional elements compared to the previous step.

- "Oremus" and secret prayers (in a low voice), concluding with *Per omnia* in a loud voice.
- Preface introduced by dialogue, then *Sanctus*.
- Roman Canon, concluded by the doxology *Per Ipsum* (during which the celebrant traces the sign of the cross with the host over the chalice, then makes a small elevation of the host and chalice).
- Communion rites:
 - *Pater* until "Et ne nos inducas in tentationem", the server responds "Sed libera nos a malo", the celebrant "Amen" (in a low voice),
 - *Libera nos* embolism, with fraction during the doxology,
 - *Pax Domini* (with signs of the cross of the host on the chalice),
 - Commixion,
 - *Agnus Dei*,
 - kiss of peace to the server⁶⁴,
 - Communion of the priest, then the server, with the host,
 - Communion of the priest, then of the server, with the precious blood,⁶⁵
 - ablutions: purification of the mouth, fingers, chalice,
 - folding of the corporal,
 - Communion antiphon,
 - "Dominus vobiscum" then the post-communion.
- Concluding rites:
 - "Ite missa est" (or "Benedicamus Domino")
 - *Placeat* prayer,
 - verse *Animæ omnium Fidelium* (if there was a collection *pro defunctis*).

To this must be added all the gestural details, which are numerous throughout the text (signs of the cross, bows, kisses of the altar and the book, position of the person praying, fingers joined), but which we cannot mention here. Both the manner in which they are to be performed and the moment at which they are to be performed are indicated. It seems that the concern is not to leave anything to chance or to the celebrant's discretion.

e. In the 13th century (according to the ordo missæ "Indutus planeta")

It was still the regulars who were at work, but this time they drew inspiration from a papal court ceremony. The fruit of their labour would be used by all priests, regular and secular, sedentary (such as monks and canons) and itinerant (such as the Friars Minor).

⁶⁴ The sign of peace does not take place at Masses for the deceased.

⁶⁵ The celebrant receives Communion alone at Masses for the deceased.

The gestural prescriptions found in Cluniac customs concerning the celebrant are largely reflected in this *ordo missæ*, with a few additions that we will discuss below. It should also be noted that these prescriptions are now codified by *the Indutus*, to make them clearer, more universal and more enduring.

Let us now look at the elements of *the Indutus* that differ from the Cluniac rite, in the order in which they are performed:

- Codification of gestures that are repeated several times during Mass:
 - two types of bow (a deep one and a medium one),
 - manner of kissing the altar,
 - the manner of joining the hands,
 - the manner of holding them apart and raised (the attitude of the worshipper, modest and measured, was already described in the course of the Cluniac Mass),
 - the manner of blessing the host and the chalice together,
 - very few indications regarding the volume of the voice.
- No *washing of hands* at the beginning of Mass.
- No genuflection when arriving at or leaving the altar. In fact, there is no prescribed genuflection throughout the entire Mass.
- Bow at the altar (in the middle) before leaving it during Mass, but not at the beginning or end.
- Recitation of the proper parts between the epistle and the gospel (gradual, tract, alleluia).
- The missal is carried to the left later: for the Gospel and not for the Epistle.
- The chalice is prepared during Mass (the wine is poured into it before the Offertory, and the water – after being blessed – during the Offertory).
- The offertory includes more prayers:
 - the Offertory antiphon after the initial "Oremus",
 - a different one for each of the two oblations (*Suscipe sancte Pater* and *Offerimus tibi*),
 - another for the blessing and infusion of water into the chalice (*Deus qui humane*),
 - a prayer of epiclesis (*Veni sanctificator*),
 - and a final prayer in honour of the Holy Trinity (*Suscipe sancta trinitas*).
- The position of the host on the corporal in relation to the chalice is specified: the chalice is on the right, the host on the left.
- Elevation of the host after its consecration.
- The joining of the fingers begins later (after the consecration of the chalice).
- Beginning of reverence (inclination) before the sacred species.

- The chalice is uncovered/covered more frequently, which is more convenient thanks to the second corporal (folded) used solely for this purpose.
- Bow while reciting the *Agnus Dei*.
- Prayers in preparation for the kiss of peace and communion.
- More precise mode of communion:
 - prayers recited while taking the paten and chalice,
 - preparation with the *Domine non sum dignus*,
 - he makes the sign of the cross with the paten or chalice before receiving the body and blood,
 - he receives the body with his tongue.
- Only the celebrant receives Communion.
- Only two ablutions (the first for the chalice and mouth, the second for the fingers).
- *Lavabo* after the ablutions.
- Final blessing.

Conclusion

At the end of this study, we can conclude that Mass celebrated "in private" may date back to the early centuries of the Church, even though we have no irrefutable evidence available to us dating from before the 8th century. Its existence in the 6th century is very probable; it is highly likely to very probable for the early centuries. It was practised mainly by sedentary priests living in communities (monks and canons) and by hermits, as well as by itinerant missionary priests. A definite development took place in monasteries during the Carolingian reform, particularly when Masses began to be celebrated for the souls of the deceased.

The ritual form of the "private" Mass evolved over time and according to circumstances.

a) Over time, we have seen that its content has expanded. As the priest is the sole liturgist, he does not perform the duties that fall to the ministers of the solemn Mass. This is why it was most likely reduced to a pure *sacrificium* in its early days. It then gradually acquired the elements of the public Mass, starting in the 6th century, and eventually came to align itself with the order of the latter. This was already the case, with a few exceptions, at the end of the 11th century in the Cluniac monasteries in France and the Empire.

Those familiar with these places have allowed us to observe another development over time: the considerable progress in the precision required of the celebrant in the sequence of gestures and words. So much so that by the end of the 11th century, in Cluny, the ritual of the "private" Mass – much more detailed than that of the solemn conventual Mass in terms of the celebrant's gestures and attitudes – began to supplant it in its normative prerogative. This trend was confirmed in *the Ordo Missæ Indutus planeta*: the "private" Mass is clearly presented there as the norm for all celebrations, even solemn ones. This *ordo* is the direct ancestor of *the Ritus servandus in celebratione Missæ* of

the 1570 missal, which clearly presents the "private" Mass as the basis to which the actions prescribed for the deacon and subdeacon of the solemn Mass are occasionally added.

b) We can also deduce from our study that the form of the "private" Mass may have varied according to circumstances.

A sedentary priest living in a community (particularly a monk), because he has little time to celebrate Mass (he may be required to celebrate several Masses a day) and also attends conventual Mass, may be content with a more simplified ritual, beginning directly at the start of the Offertory.⁶⁶

On the other hand, an itinerant priest, who may not have an altar server and who does not attend conventual Mass, will more naturally follow a more complete ritual.

* *

In hindsight, it seems logical that the ritual of the "private" Mass would necessarily have become closer to that of the solemn Mass over time, in order to outwardly manifest its identity with it. We have just pointed out that this is precisely what happened.

Nevertheless, our analysis also shows that this convergence did not take place without difficulties. For example, it seems that the more the "private" Mass resembled the public Mass in terms of ritual, the more it diverted the faithful from the latter. There were certainly other reasons for the decline in interest in solemn public Mass between the 10th and 13th centuries, but competition from the "private" Mass was certainly one of them. A certain balance was achieved, notably by granting monk-priests the option of not receiving communion at conventual Mass.⁶⁷ Apart from this question of communion, priests were given complete freedom to celebrate "privately" or not. There was clearly never any obligation to celebrate it, nor, conversely, any lasting and general prohibition. The rare prohibitions concerned the abusive use of "private" Mass (solitary Masses, domestic Masses, multiple daily celebrations, etc.) and not the principle itself; St. Francis' ruling, which did not last long, was more of a recommendation than an obligation.

We can therefore reasonably assert that this ritual development took place organically: slowly, gradually, with interventions by the authorities – both in terms of the conditions to be met in order to celebrate "in private" and in terms of the ritual form to be followed – which remained discreet and limited to cases of obvious abuse.⁶⁸ Consequently, the "private" Mass is indeed traditional in the Roman Church.

* *

Allow us to respond to a legitimate objection regarding "private" celebrations.

Many voices are rightly raised to point out the risk of losing the communal dimension of the Eucharistic sacrifice by attending or celebrating a "private" Mass. This is the case with Vogel, who

⁶⁶ As seems to have still been the case in Rome for the solemn Mass on Holy Thursday in the 7th century.

⁶⁷ It was precisely the communion of all priests at the same conventual Mass that St. Francis of Assisi wanted to restore to its former glory.

⁶⁸ Cf. the criteria for the organic development of the liturgy put forward by A. Reid and noted in the introduction.

recalls in this regard that the *fermentum* once made it possible not to isolate one Mass from another.⁶⁹ This rite outwardly manifested the unity of all celebrations with that of the Pope and, through it, with the Paschal mystery that it makes present. Each Mass is therefore linked to the redemptive action of Christ, accomplished "once and for all"⁷⁰, and is thereby united with all other Masses. Furthermore, this rite of *the fermentum* also shows that Mass is not a simple ascetic exercise or private devotion⁷¹: Mass is not an action of the celebrant and the assistants, but is truly the action of Christ and the Church.

It seems to us that the rubrics, which have developed considerably and have reached such a degree of precision that nothing seems to have been left to chance, providentially fulfil the role that the *fermentum* once played. They ensure the unity of all Masses among themselves, through the observance of common rules. They also demonstrate the priest's communion with his hierarchy by requiring him to obey the rules emanating from it. Finally, by obeying, the priest imitates the example of the Son, the high priest, who did not come to do his own will, but that of his Father.

* *

After recalling that "priestly spirituality is intrinsically Eucharistic," Benedict XVI, in the apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*, recommends to priests "the daily celebration of Mass, even without the participation of the faithful."⁷²

He adds:

This recommendation corresponds above all to the objectively infinite value of each Eucharistic celebration; it then draws from it a reason for particular spiritual effectiveness, because, if lived with attention and faith, the Mass is formative in the deepest sense of the term, in that it promotes conformity to Christ and strengthens the priest in his vocation.⁷³

I will leave the last word to Benedict XVI. While he was still Cardinal Ratzinger and visiting the Abbey of Notre-Dame de Fontgombault in 2001 for the *Liturgical Days*, he confided in Dom Antoine Forgeot, the abbot. During his stay, the cardinal had been able to celebrate conventual Mass alone, which all the monks – even the priests – had attended. When the morning of his departure arrived, at dawn, he was invited by the abbot to walk through the abbey church one last time before returning to his car. It was precisely the moment when nine monk-priests were offering the Holy Sacrifice, as they did every morning, simultaneously, "in private," each at his own altar. The

⁶⁹ Cf. C. Vogel, *Une mutation*, 246.

⁷⁰ Heb 9:12.

⁷¹ C. Vogel seems to contrast the individual *opus bonum* dimension of Mass with its dimension as a communal act (cf. C. Vogel *Une mutation* 247-248). However, the two are complementary and not opposed.

⁷² Benedict XVI *Sacramentum Caritatis* 80.

⁷³ *Id.* 80.

cardinal admired this timeless spectacle in silence for a few moments; then, once outside, he whispered in his host's ear: "That is the Catholic Church!"⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Dom Antoine Forgeot, mb, confirmed these facts under oath in a handwritten letter dated 14/02/2014 and addressed to the author.