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**Responsa ad dubia of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments  
on some provisions of the Apostolic Letter issued Motu Proprio Traditionis Custodes of the  
Supreme Pontiff Francis**

Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments

**RESPONSA AD DUBIA**

**on certain provisions of the**

**Apostolic Letter**

**TRADITIONIS CUSTODES**

**issued "Motu Proprio" by the Supreme Pontiff**

**FRANCIS**

**TO THE PRESIDENTS**

**OF THE CONFERENCES OF BISHOPS**

Your Eminence / Your Excellency,

Following the publication by Pope Francis of the Apostolic Letter "Motu Proprio data" *Traditionis custodes* on the use of the liturgical books from prior to the reform of the Second Vatican Council, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, which exercises the authority of the Apostolic See for material within its competence (cf. *Traditionis custodes*, n. 7), received several requests for clarification on its correct application. Some questions have been raised from several quarters and with greater frequency. Therefore, after having carefully considered them, having informed the Holy Father and having received his assent, the

responses to the most recurrent questions are published herewith.

The text of the Motu Proprio and the accompanying Letter to the Bishops of the whole world clearly express the reasons for the decisions taken by Pope Francis. The first aim is to continue “in the constant search for ecclesial communion” (*Traditionis custodes*, Preamble) which is expressed by recognising in the liturgical books promulgated by the Popes Saint Paul VI and Saint John Paul II, in conformity with the decrees of the Second Vatican Council, the unique expression of the *lex orandi* of the Roman Rite (cf. *Traditionis custodes*, n. 1). This is the direction in which we wish to move, and this is the meaning of the responses we publish here. Every prescribed norm has always the sole purpose of preserving the gift of ecclesial communion by walking together, with conviction of mind and heart, in the direction indicated by the Holy Father.

It is sad to see how the deepest bond of unity, the sharing in the one Bread broken which is His Body offered so that all may be one (cf. Jhn 17:21), becomes a cause for division. It is the duty of the Bishops, *cum Petro et sub Petro*, to safeguard communion, which, as the Apostle Paul reminds us (cf. 1 Cor 11:17-34), is a necessary condition for being able to participate at the Eucharistic table.

One fact is undeniable: The Council Fathers perceived the urgent need for a reform so that the truth of the faith as celebrated might appear ever more in all its beauty, and the People of God might grow in full, active, conscious participation in the liturgical celebration (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* n. 14), which is the present moment in the history of salvation, the memorial of the Lord's Passover, our one and only hope.

As pastors we must not lend ourselves to sterile polemics, capable only of creating division, in which the ritual itself is often exploited by ideological viewpoints. Rather, we are all called to rediscover the value of the liturgical reform by preserving the truth and beauty of the Rite that it has given us. For this to happen, we are aware that a renewed and continuous liturgical formation is necessary both for Priests and for the lay faithful.

At the solemn closing of the second session of the Council (4 December 1963), St Paul VI said (n. 11):

“The difficult, complex debates have had rich results. They have brought one topic to a conclusion, the sacred liturgy. Treated before all others, in a sense it has priority over all others for its intrinsic dignity and importance to the life of the Church and today we will solemnly promulgate the document on the liturgy. Our spirit, therefore, exults with true joy, for in the way things have gone we note respect for a right scale of values and duties. God must hold first place; prayer to him is our first duty. The liturgy is the first source of the divine communion in which God shares his own life with us. It is also the first school of the spiritual life. The liturgy is the first gift we must make to the Christian people united to us by faith and the fervour of their prayers. It is also a primary invitation to the human race, so that all may lift their now mute voices in blessed and genuine prayer and thus may experience that indescribable, regenerative power to be found when they join us in proclaiming the praises of God and the hopes of the human heart through Christ and the Holy Spirit”.

When Pope Francis (Address to the participants in the 68th National Liturgical Week, Rome, 24 August 2017) reminds us that “after this magisterium, after this long journey, We can affirm with certainty and with magisterial authority that the liturgical reform is irreversible” he wants to point us to the only direction in which we are joyfully called to turn our commitment as pastors.

Let us entrust our service “to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4,3), to Mary, Mother of the Church.

From the offices of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 4 December 2021, on the 58th anniversary of the promulgation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

Prefect

*The Supreme Pontiff Francis, in the course of an Audience granted to the Prefect of this Congregation on 18 November 2021, was informed of and gave his consent to the publication of these RESPONSA AD DUBIA with attached EXPLANATORY NOTES.*

*Traditionis custodes*

Art. 3. Episcopus, in dioecesis ubi adhuc unus vel plures coetus celebrant secundum Missale antecessens instaurationem anni 1970:

[...]

§2. statuatur unum vel plures locos ubi fideles, qui his coetibus adhaerent, convenire possint ad Eucharistiam celebrandam (nec autem in ecclesiis paroecialibus nec novas paroecias personales erigens);

***To the proposed question:***

When it is not possible to find a church, oratory or chapel which is available to accommodate the faithful who celebrate using the *Missale Romanum (Editio typica 1962)*, can the diocesan Bishop ask the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments for a dispensation from the provision of the Motu Proprio *Traditionis custodes* (Art. 3 § 2), and thus allow such a celebration in the parish church?

***The answer is:***

Affirmative.

***Explanatory note.***

The Motu Proprio *Traditionis custodes* in art. 3 § 2 requests that the Bishop, in dioceses where up to now there has been the presence of one or more groups celebrating according to the Missal prior to the reform of 1970, “designate one or more locations where the faithful adherents of these groups may gather for the Eucharistic celebration (not however in the parochial churches and without the erection of new personal parishes)”. The exclusion of the parish church is intended to affirm that the celebration of the Eucharist according to the previous rite, being a concession limited to these groups, is not part of the ordinary life of the parish community.

This Congregation, exercising the authority of the Holy See in matters within its competence (cf. *Traditionis custodes*, n. 7), can grant, at the request of the diocesan Bishop, that the parish church be used to celebrate according to the *Missale Romanum* of 1962 only if it is established that it is impossible to use another church, oratory or chapel. The assessment of this impossibility must be made with the utmost care.

Moreover, such a celebration should not be included in the parish Mass schedule, since it is attended only by the faithful who are members of the said group. Finally, it should not be held at the same time as the pastoral

activities of the parish community. It is to be understood that when another venue becomes available, this permission will be withdrawn.

There is no intention in these provisions to marginalise the faithful who are rooted in the previous form of celebration: they are only meant to remind them that this is a concession to provide for their good (in view of the common use of the one *lex orandi* of the Roman Rite) and not an opportunity to promote the previous rite.

### *Traditionis custodes*

Art. 1. Libri liturgici a sanctis Pontificibus Paulo VI et Ioanne Paulo II promulgati, iuxta decreta Concilii Vaticani II, unica expressio "legis orandi" Ritus Romani sunt.

Art. 8. Normae, dispositiones, concessiones et consuetudines antecedentes, quae conformes non sint cum harum Litterarum Apostolicarum Motu Proprio datarum praescriptis, abrogantur.

### ***To the proposed question:***

Is it possible, according to the provisions of the Motu Proprio *Traditionis Custodes*, to celebrate the sacraments with the *Rituale Romanum* and the *Pontificale Romanum* which predate the liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council?

### ***The answer is:***

Negative.

The diocesan Bishop is authorised to grant permission to use only the *Rituale Romanum* (last *editio typica* 1952) and not the *Pontificale Romanum* which predate the liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council. He may grant this permission only to those canonically erected personal parishes which, according to the provisions of the Motu Proprio *Traditionis custodes*, celebrate using the *Missale Romanum* of 1962.

### ***Explanatory note.***

The Motu Proprio *Traditionis custodes* intends to re-establish in the whole Church of the Roman Rite a single and identical prayer expressing its unity, according to the liturgical books promulgated by the Popes Saint Paul VI and Saint John Paul II, in conformity with the decrees of the Second Vatican Council and in line with the tradition of the Church.

The diocesan Bishop, as the moderator, promoter and guardian of all liturgical life, must work to ensure that his diocese returns to a unitary form of celebration (cf. Pope Francis, Letter to the Bishops of the whole world that accompanies the Apostolic Letter Motu Proprio data *Traditionis custodes*).

This Congregation, exercising the authority of the Holy See in matters within its competence (cf. *Traditionis custodes*, n. 7), affirms that, in order to make progress in the direction indicated by the Motu Proprio, it should not grant permission to use the *Rituale Romanum* and the *Pontificale Romanum* which predate the liturgical reform, these are liturgical books which, like all previous norms, instructions, concessions and customs, have been abrogated (cf. *Traditionis Custodes*, n. 8).

After discernment the diocesan Bishop is authorised to grant permission to use only the *Rituale*

*Romanum* (last *editio typica* 1952) and not the *Pontificale Romanum* which predate the liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council. This permission is to be granted only to canonically erected personal parishes which, according to the provisions of the Motu Proprio *Traditionis custodes*, celebrate with the *Missale Romanum* of 1962. It should be remembered that the formula for the Sacrament of Confirmation was changed for the entire Latin Church by Saint Paul VI with the Apostolic Constitution *Divinæ consortium naturæ* (15 August 1971).

This provision is intended to underline the need to clearly affirm the direction indicated by the Motu Proprio which sees in the liturgical books promulgated by the Saints Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II, in conformity with the decrees of the Second Vatican Council, the unique expression of the *lex orandi* of the Roman Rite (cf. *Traditionis custodes*, n. 1).

In implementing these provisions, care should be taken to accompany all those rooted in the previous form of celebration towards a full understanding of the value of the celebration in the ritual form given to us by the reform of the Second Vatican Council. This should take place through an appropriate formation that makes it possible to discover how the reformed liturgy is the witness to an unchanged faith, the expression of a renewed ecclesiology, and the primary source of spirituality for Christian life.

### *Traditionis custodes*

Art. 3. Episcopus, in dioecesibus ubi adhuc unus vel plures coetus celebrant secundum Missale antecessens instaurationem anni 1970:

§1. certior fiat coetus illos auctoritatem ac legitimam naturam instaurationis liturgicae, normarum Concilii Vaticani II Magisterii Summorum Pontificum non excludere;

### ***To the proposed question:***

*If a Priest who has been granted the use of the Missale Romanum of 1962 does not recognise the validity and legitimacy of concelebration – refusing to concelebrate, in particular, at the Chrism Mass – can he continue to benefit from this concession?*

### ***The answer is:***

Negative.

However, before revoking the concession to use the *Missale Romanum* of 1962, the Bishop should take care to establish a fraternal dialogue with the Priest, to ascertain that this attitude does not exclude the validity and legitimacy of the liturgical reform, the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and the Magisterium of the Supreme Pontiffs, and to accompany him towards an understanding of the value of concelebration, particularly at the Chrism Mass.

### ***Explanatory note.***

Art. 3 § 1 of the Motu Proprio *Traditionis custodes* requires the diocesan Bishop to ascertain that the groups requesting to celebrate with the *Missale Romanum* of 1962 “do not deny the validity and the legitimacy of the liturgical reform, dictated by Vatican Council II and the Magisterium of the Supreme Pontiffs”.

St Paul forcefully reminds the community of Corinth to live in unity as a necessary condition to be able to

participate at the Eucharistic table (cf. 1 Cor 11,17-34).

In the Letter sent to the Bishops of the whole world to accompany the text of the Motu Proprio *Traditionis custodes*, the Holy Father says: “Because ‘liturgical celebrations are not private actions, but celebrations of the Church, which is the *sacrament of unity*’ (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 26), they must be carried out in communion with the Church. Vatican Council II, while it reaffirmed the external bonds of incorporation in the Church — the profession of faith, the sacraments, of communion — affirmed with St. Augustine that to remain in the Church not only ‘with the body’ but also ‘with the heart’ is a condition for salvation (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 14)”.

The explicit choice not to take part in concelebration, particularly at the Chrism Mass, seems to express a lack of acceptance of the liturgical reform and a lack of ecclesial communion with the Bishop, both of which are necessary requirements in order to benefit from the concession to celebrate with the *Missale Romanum* of 1962.

*However, before revoking the concession to use the Missale Romanum of 1962, the Bishop should offer the Priest the necessary time for a sincere discussion on the deeper motivations that lead him not to recognise the value of concelebration, in particular in the Mass presided over by the Bishop. He should invite him to express, in the eloquent gesture of concelebration, that ecclesial communion which is a necessary condition for being able to participate at the table of the Eucharistic sacrifice.*

#### *Traditionis custodes*

Art. 3. Episcopus, in dioecesibus ubi adhuc unus vel plures coetus celebrant secundum Missale antecedens instaurationem anni 1970:

[...]

§3. constituat, in loco statuto, dies quibus celebrationes eucharisticae secundum Missale Romanum a sancto Ioanne XXIII anno 1962 promulgatum permittuntur. His in celebrationibus, lectiones proclamentur lingua vernacula, adhibitis Sacrae Scripturae translationibus ad usum liturgicum ab unaquaque Conferentia Episcoporum approbatis;

#### ***To the proposed question:***

*In Eucharistic celebrations using the Missale Romanum of 1962, is it possible to use the full text of the Bible for the readings, choosing the pericopes indicated in the Missal??*

#### ***The answer is:***

Affirmative.

#### ***Explanatory note.***

Art. 3 § 3 of the Motu Proprio *Traditionis custodes* states that the readings are to be proclaimed in the vernacular language, using translations of Sacred Scripture for liturgical use, approved by the respective Episcopal Conferences.

Since the texts of the readings are contained in the Missal itself, and therefore there is no separate Lectionary, and in order to observe the provisions of the *Motu Proprio*, one must necessarily resort to the translation of the Bible approved by the individual Bishops' Conferences for liturgical use, choosing the pericopes indicated in the *Missale Romanum* of 1962.

No vernacular lectionaries may be published that reproduce the cycle of readings of the previous rite.

It should be remembered that the present Lectionary is one of the most precious fruits of the liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council. The publication of the Lectionary, in addition to overcoming the "plenary" form of the *Missale Romanum* of 1962 and returning to the ancient tradition of individual books corresponding to individual ministries, fulfils the wish of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 51: "The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly, so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's word. In this way a more representative portion of the holy scriptures will be read to the people in the course of a prescribed number of years".

#### *Traditionis custodes*

Art. 4. Presbyteri ordinati post has Litteras Apostolicas Motu Proprio datas promulgatas, celebrare volentes iuxta Missale Romanum anno 1962 editum, petitionem formalem Episcopo dioecesano mittere debent, qui, ante concessionem, a Sede Apostolica licentiam rogabit.

#### ***To the proposed question:***

Does the diocesan Bishop have to be authorised by the Apostolic See to allow priests ordained after the publication of the *Motu Proprio Traditionis custodes* to celebrate with the *Missale Romanum* of 1962 (cf. *Traditionis custodes*, n. 4)?

#### ***The answer is:***

Affirmative.

#### ***Explanatory note.***

Article 4 of the Latin text (which is the official text to be referenced) reads as follows: «Presbyteri ordinati post has Litteras Apostolicas Motu Proprio datas promulgatas, celebrare volentes iuxta Missale Romanum anno 1962 editum, petitionem formalem Episcopo dioecesano mittere debent, qui, ante concessionem, a Sede Apostolica licentiam rogabit».

This is not merely a consultative opinion, but a necessary authorisation given to the diocesan Bishop by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, which exercises the authority of the Holy See over matters within its competence. (cf. *Traditionis custodes*, n. 7).

Only after receiving this permission will the diocesan Bishop be able to authorise Priests ordained after the publication of the *Motu Proprio* (16 July 2021) to celebrate with the *Missale Romanum* of 1962.

This rule is intended to assist the diocesan Bishop in evaluating such a request: his discernment will be duly taken into account by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

The Motu Proprio clearly expresses the desire that what is contained in the liturgical books promulgated by Popes Saint Paul VI and Saint John Paul II, in conformity with the decrees of the Second Vatican Council, be recognised as the unique expression of the *lex orandi* of the Roman Rite: it is therefore absolutely essential that Priests ordained after the publication of the Motu Proprio share this desire of the Holy Father.

All seminary formators, seeking to walk with solicitude in the direction indicated by Pope Francis, are encouraged to accompany future Deacons and Priests to an understanding and experience of the richness of the liturgical reform called for by the Second Vatican Council. This reform has enhanced every element of the Roman Rite and has fostered - as hoped for by the Council Fathers - the full, conscious and active participation of the entire People of God in the liturgy (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* no. 14), the primary source of authentic Christian spirituality.

#### *Traditionis custodes*

Art. 5. Presbyteri, qui iam secundum Missale Romanum anno 1962 editum celebrant, ab Episcopo dioecesano licentiam rogabunt ad hanc facultatem servandam.

#### ***To the proposed question:***

*Can the faculty to celebrate using the Missale Romanum of 1962 be granted ad tempus?*

#### ***The answer is:***

Affirmative.

#### ***Explanatory note.***

The possibility of granting the use of the *Missale Romanum* of 1962 for a defined period of time - the duration of which the diocesan Bishop will consider appropriate - is not only possible but also recommended: the end of the defined period offers the possibility of ascertaining that everything is in harmony with the direction established by the Motu Proprio. The outcome of this assessment can provide grounds for prolonging or suspending the permission.

#### ***To the proposed question:***

*Does the faculty granted by the diocesan Bishop to celebrate using the Missale Romanum of 1962 only apply to the territory of his own diocese?*

#### ***The answer is:***

Affirmative.

#### ***To the proposed question:***



*If the authorised Priest is absent or unable to attend, must the person replacing him also have formal authorisation?*

***The answer is:***

Affirmative.

***To the proposed question:***

Do Deacons and instituted ministers participating in celebrations using the *Missale Romanum* of 1962 have to be authorised by the diocesan Bishop?

***The answer is:***

Affermative.

***To the proposed question:***

*Can a Priest who is authorised to celebrate with the Missale Romanum of 1962 and who, because of his office (Parish Priest, chaplain, etc.), also celebrates on weekdays with the Missale Romanum of the reform of the Second Vatican Council, binate using the Missale Romanum of 1962?*

***The answer is:***

Negative.

***Explanatory note.***

The Parish Priest or chaplain who - in the fulfilment of his office - celebrates on weekdays with the current *Missale Romanum*, which is the unique expression of the *lex orandi* of the Roman Rite, cannot binate by celebrating with the *Missale Romanum* of 1962, either with a group or privately.

It is not possible to grant bination on the grounds that there is no "just cause" or "pastoral necessity" as required by canon 905 §2: the right of the faithful to the celebration of the Eucharist is in no way denied, since they are offered the possibility of participating in the Eucharist in its current ritual form.

***To the proposed question:***

*Can a Priest who is authorised to celebrate using the Missale Romanum of 1962 celebrate on the same day with the same Missal for another group of faithful who have received authorisation?*

***The answer is:***

Negative.

***Explanatory note.***

It is not possible to grant bination on the grounds that there is no “just cause” or “pastoral necessity” as required by canon 905 §2: the right of the faithful to the celebration of the Eucharist is in no way denied, since they are offered the possibility of participating in the Eucharist in its current ritual form.

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