

Interview With Fr. Gabet, Msgr. Schmitz...Part 2 of 3

Latin Liturgical Tradition Leads Faithful To Holiness

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This article is the second of a three-part series based upon interviews with Msgr. Michael Schmitz, who heads up the Institute of Christ the King, Sovereign Priest (ICKSP) in the U.S., and Fr. George Gabet, the North American General Superior for the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter (FSSP).

Both priests reveal the phenomenal growth they are experiencing in Traditional Latin Mass communities, both in terms of numbers of families, as well as the number of young men attracted to vocations to the priesthood in the traditional rites.

Some well-meaning Catholics may object to measuring spiritual growth in pure numbers and raw data. Indeed, the totality of the spiritual life within the Church cannot be entirely measured and calculated as accountants measure success in the business world.

However, Pope Benedict XVI, in his *Salt of the Earth*, by Peter Seewald, gave the following answer to this very question put to him by Seewald.

“In this sense, we can’t calmly sit down and say, ‘Well, there’s no promise of large numbers; success isn’t one of the names of God; we’ve done our part, and we’ll see who comes and who doesn’t.’ This inner restlessness that comes from knowing we have a gift that is meant for humanity must always be present in the Church,” said then Cardinal Ratzinger in this Ignatius Press book published in 1997.

The facts of the extraordinary measurable decline of Baptisms, conversions, priestly vocations, religious vocations, and seminarians in the U.S. Church since 1965 are well documented by Kenneth Jones in his *Index of Leading Catholic Indicators*. This steep slide is especially stark in comparison to the explosive growth in these statistics in the U.S. Church from the 1930s to the 1960s.

The fact that this comparatively small, and much persecuted, pocket within the Church has an influx of both parishioners and priestly vocations indicates the Holy Ghost is at work in these Traditional Latin Mass communities.

This outward-looking, evangelical Catholicism is also alive and well, as these communities grow in such Bible Belt bastions as Chattanooga, Tenn.; Atlanta; Tyler, Texas; Little Rock, Ark.; and Taylors, S.C. A surprising percentage of these priestly vocations and attendees are converts or reverts to the faith.

One comment particularly stood out in this particular interview. This is when Msgr. Schmitz said, “You cannot condemn a form of liturgy that has always existed and that has produced, through the help of divine grace, so many saints and so many holy priests and religious.”

Indeed, this same thought is echoed by the current Pope, again, from *Salt of the Earth*:

“A community is calling its very being into question when it suddenly declares that what until now was its holiest and highest possession is strictly forbidden and when it makes the longing for it seem downright indecent. Can it be trusted more about anything else? Won’t it proscribe tomorrow what it prescribes today?”

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Q. Msgr. Schmitz, at the November 2005 *Una Voce* conference in Providence, R.I., you said that the Classical Roman rite was the rite that best expressed the Catholic faith. Why do think that? Can you elaborate for those who are new to the Classical Roman rite?

Msgr. Schmitz: First, let me make clear that I said that without any polemic or aggressive attitude toward the newer developments in the Church.

But you have immediately the impression that younger people, especially, understand the presence of the divine and the awe and veneration toward God in a deeper sense in many cases through the Traditional Latin Mass.

I have celebrated both rites in the past. Today, at the Institute, with the permission of the Holy Father, I celebrate exclusively the Traditional Latin rite, and have never witnessed so many conversions to

the Catholic faith, or so many reversions to the Church by fallen-away Catholics since the time I have celebrated only the Traditional Latin Mass with the Institute of Christ the King.

Also, I have been deeply touched by the fact that all of our faithful want to become holy. The faith that is part of their daily lives is very alive within the realm of traditional Catholics. That does not mean that this is not so outside [of the traditional movement].

But it is a general wish for those who attend the Traditional Latin Mass to make the liturgy part of their lives. They want to bring the awe they experience during the liturgy into their private homes. They want to become part of the supernatural also in their daily duties.

I have had the impression that there has been in the past this Catholic feeling that the liturgy does not end at the Communion rail. Whereas, many people today make it only part of their private religious life. It's not their fault. And this translation of the supernatural -- the beauty, the doctrine, the faith -- into what you do daily is evidently something the faithful who attend the Traditional Latin Mass feel very strongly about.

And certainly, we try to foster that because we do not want to be a private religion that is celebrated in a forlorn little pocket of the Church. The Catholic mentality is very outgoing. The Traditional Latin Mass seems to foster this outgoing mentality that integrates your daily life into your religious convictions.

Q. In November 2005, at the *Una Voce* conference, in his keynote address, Bishop Fernando Rifan emphasized the need for Catholic families to have the full traditional Catholic parish life available, with all the sacraments and Catholic culture. What has been your experience with North American bishops and this desire of the faithful for a full traditional parish life?

Fr. Gabet: It has been my experience that more bishops are opening up to allowing the Traditional Mass, whether it is with our Fraternity, or whether it is the indult Mass, maybe once a month, or even once a week.

But we do remember that Pope John Paul II, in *Ecclesia Dei*, asked for a generous application of this permission for all those attached to the Latin liturgical tradition to have not just the Mass, but the sacraments and the blessings. And he calls them the Roman traditions -- not just the Mass.

By granting the Fraternity of St. Peter the right to use not only the *Missale Romanum* of 1962, but also the other liturgical books such as the *Rituale*, which contains all the rubrics for the other sacraments as well as the blessings for persons and objects.

He has also given us the *Pontificale*, which gives the rubrics for bishops if they want to come to our place to do Confirmations or perhaps the dedication or consecration of a church. We are able to use the rites of 1962. That has been given to us.

He has given us the Roman breviary according to the typical edition of 1962. All of these books in force at that time have been given to us. And I think this really demonstrates that it was not just for the Mass, but for all of the sacraments...all of the traditions of the Church.

We find that some bishops are allowing the Traditional Latin Mass perhaps as an indult, but some are perhaps a bit hesitant regarding the other sacraments -- especially those who don't know the Fraternity of St. Peter or don't know the traditional movement.

One of the responses has been that "Oh, this will be divisive." But we have found that has not been the case in the places we've been. And certainly, just by the fact we have been invited into four [new] dioceses this year, a lot of the bishops are seeing this is not the case; this is not divisive.

Usually, when we're invited to come into the diocese, we've given the authority for all of the sacraments that Rome has given us. We have a right to those books and everything in them. And normally, most of the time, that is what happens.

However, in some places, the bishop may just want us to offer the Mass on a Sunday or once a month, or just to have Mass and hear Confessions. And I think in these cases, the gradual approach is indeed more prudent because in time the bishop will see that we are obedient to him. We won't overstep our authority.

Yes, we have the right by Rome to use those books, but we see him as our shepherd. He is the ordinary of the place, so we respect that and we are obedient to him. And when he sees that we're not divisive and that we are providing for the needs of his faithful, eventually more bishops permit us to a full apostolate with daily Mass and the sacraments.

But as our reputation has grown among the bishops, we are finding that less often our ministry is limited. In most of the places we go into, we are allowed to have the Mass and all of the sacraments.

Some bishops feel a little intimidated by doing the Confirmations in Latin. But there are different degrees. We would love to see a Solemn Pontifical Mass followed by Confirmation. But the rubrics allow for different degrees of that.

It can be as limited as a priest offering the Mass with the bishop assisting at the throne, and then doing just the Confirmations afterward. So it can be as elaborate or as simple as the bishop likes. Of course, we always have our priests there to be the masters of ceremonies to help them out throughout the entire rite. We follow the 1962 rubrics.

A Sense Of The Sacred

Q. In an age of a dearth of vocations, why do you think there are so many young men discerning calls to the priesthood to traditional orders, and so many diocesan seminarians desire to offer the Classical Roman rite of Mass and sacraments?

Msgr. Schmitz: I believe it is the essence of the priesthood that is being discovered by these young men. The priesthood is about the sacrifice of the Lord. The priesthood is centered on the sacraments, and the first and foremost sacrament, to which all the other sacraments lead, to the Holy Eucharist. By discovering they are men of the Holy Eucharist, they certainly also discover the Holy Eucharist has a history. And to this history, there belongs beauty; there belongs awe; there belongs respect for the liturgical detail.

And they find all those things in the Traditional Latin Mass.

Therefore, even if many of these young men want to be diocesan priests and stay faithfully in their dioceses, they ask to learn the Traditional Latin Mass simply because it is attracting them from the standpoint of their vocation to the priesthood, which is a priesthood of sacrifice.

And then I believe also that more and more, the break with history that had been established in the past in the formation of the priests has been replaced with a more organic view of the past and the present of the Church. You cannot condemn a form of liturgy that has always existed and that has produced, through the help of divine grace, so many saints and so many holy priests and religious.

And now those who are appointed to form these young priests understand that and it leads them to a greater generosity when it comes to discovering the riches of the liturgical treasure of the Church.

Fr. Gabet: You wonder. We're growing. Some of the places we're in like Lincoln, Neb., they have plenty of priests. Some of the dioceses we're in, the bishops are doing something right. But some of the others who won't accept us, they wonder why they're not getting any vocations.

I believe part of the reason why we're attracting so many men to discern their vocations in traditional orders is because of the reverence in the Traditional Latin Mass and sacraments. You actually give them a sense of the sacred. And that is what it takes to attract these young men to discern a vocation.

For me, I saw that the actions showed what we believe. Using the old idiom -- *lex orandi, lex credendi*.

When I saw the priests, the servers and the faithful, doing a genuflection -- not just a slight bow of the head -- but an actual genuflection to the King of Kings each time before they pass before the tabernacle, it shows they truly believe that God is truly present in the tabernacle. And we have come to worship Him.

In the Traditional Latin Mass, the emphasis is on the sacrifice. The priest has not come to be the master of ceremonies, but the actual mediator between God and man. He therefore directs himself toward the tabernacle. He does indeed turn toward the people to invite them to pray and to offer up their prayers, sacrifices, and supplications -- but to put them on his shoulders so that he will offer them during the holy sacrifice.

Certainly, it is a community gathered together. And of course it is obvious they will partake of a spiritual meal. But the emphasis is certainly on the sacrifice.

At the canon of the Mass, there is that respectful silence -- that anticipation that in just a few moments -- Christ Himself will come down from Heaven and take the form of bread and wine on the altar. The fact that it is silent when you are coming to the most important part, and your attention is just focused on that.

It was certainly this reverence that attracted me to the Traditional Latin Mass. It caused me to say, "This...I will give my life for."

And I think that is exactly what the young people need today. They need something that is spiritual that will really attract them to give up the material things of the world that we are entrapped in -- and to say, "Okay. This is so beautiful. This is what God is calling me to do. I can do this."

Q. You are in the Dioceses of Lincoln, Neb., and Tyler, Texas. In recent articles for *The Wanderer*, Bishops Bruskewitz and Corrada both recently commented positively about the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter (FSSP) apostolates (and seminary in Lincoln) in their dioceses. Have you seen an uptick in requests from bishops from other dioceses for FSSP priests?

Fr. Gabet: Yes. We are getting more requests from bishops in the United States and in Canada. In the last year alone, we have been invited to open up five new apostolates. Four of these are in new dioceses: These are dioceses where we have not been before. So these are bishops who have said, "Yes. We will give the Fraternity of St. Peter a try." Four new bishops have entrusted us with the care of a portion of their flock, for which we are very grateful to them.

We have opened up places in Lexington, Ky.; Phoenix; Harrisburg, Pa., which is right next door to Scranton; and then also a brand new one in Richmond, Va., down in Chesapeake. This is going to be a brand new one and it really hasn't been announced too widely yet.

So, four new bishops have invited us in within the last year.

We have also been able to expand in the Indianapolis Diocese. We are now located in Oak Forest, which is between Indianapolis and Cincinnati [in addition to an Indianapolis apostolate].

We are seeing that a lot of the bishops are seeing what we are doing as something good.

Q. The FSSP has 34 North American apostolates in 31 dioceses, with about 70 worldwide. Would you please expound on the new Oak Forest apostolate in the Indianapolis Diocese?

Fr. Gabet: This was a parish that had been closed for five years. Then the bishop, after requests from the faithful, they began to have the Mass once a month. Fr. Dennis Duvelius came down from Indianapolis in the afternoon on Sunday, at a bad time, in the middle of nowhere.

Now, the faithful wanted to see the church reopened, and it is a beautiful church. It is like a little pearl that is there. The priest who was there before kept the traditional high altar; he kept the side altars; he kept the Communion rail.

And you walk in, and it's just like walking in back in the past and saying, "Oh boy! This is a church! It is beautiful."

And it is interesting how God has provided us with benefactors. We had a priest to send there: Fr. Gerard Saguto. He approached the parish council and they were going to buy a rectory across the street, and they said they'd be able to pay it off in five years. And he said, "Great!"

Within the next day, a benefactor had donated all the money so they could purchase it right away. All of these things seem to have just fallen into line -- like God has really blessed this apostolate. And we're hoping that it continues.

We do know that if this is going to be very good and is going to lead souls to God, then the Devil is going to be working against it too. We know that is going to happen. But at this time, it seems that God has been opening doors and really wants this there. And the archdiocese has been very generous.

So, we have five new apostolates in this past year. Things are booming.

And I believe we have a good track record of sending good, traditional priests, who are able to provide for the spiritual needs for what Pope John Paul II called "the rightful aspirations" of the faithful. We have shown we are not divisive, while guarding our specific spirituality -- being the Traditional Mass and sacraments priests -- we're able to help out the dioceses. We are able to help out the dioceses by hearing Confessions, administering Anointing of the Sick and helping out in the hospitals, by catechizing children and adults, and by bringing converts into the faith.

And it is because of this, our positive reputation among the bishops has grown, I believe. In fact, it is quite evident with four new bishops in the past year alone.

There are at least two other locations we could open up immediately if we had enough priests to begin the new apostolates. There is plenty of work. You know, "The harvest is great, but the laborers are few."

Q. In an interview on EWTN, you mentioned your new Oakland apostolate, you mentioned the rapid growth of your new Oakland apostolate. Is this still growing? What is the growth like in your other apostolates? Do you have an example?

Msgr. Schmitz: It is still growing, but a little less quickly [now]. All the apostolates are growing. It is always very astonishing.

As the provincial, I visit one apostolate after the other. And every time I come, I see new faces; I see new families; I see new young people. More often than not, I am approached by young men who want to have a private talk because they think they might have a vocation. That is not an experience that is limited to Oakland, but it is universal.

It is now also going on in Europe. We have one apostolate in Versailles, near Paris, that started out with about 100 people, but now has more than 1,000 families. They started out with one Mass, and now they are thinking about adding a fifth Mass. That is over a period of about five years.

Similar developments are to be noticed everywhere. I have to say it is not an exception.

Also, priests who celebrate the English Mass in a very reverent way according to the Missal know a growth. They see the people want to have contact with their Savior in a reverent way, and that attracts them -- especially, I have to say again -- younger people.

The beautiful thing is that we have that growth not only in quantity, but I would also say in religious and spiritual quality. The same people who come want to grow in their spiritual lives. So we have not only a growth in Mass attendance, but we also have an immense growth in Confessions, which sometimes poses a problem because the priest doesn't have time to meet with people because he doesn't get out of the confessional.

But I believe that is a minor problem, and a better one than to have no one [going to Confession].

So there is a growth in quantity and in quality at the same time.

Q. Can you elaborate on the size and scope of your priests, seminarians, and nuns? Particularly, please tell us about your new group of nuns and how many Americans there are currently.

Msgr. Schmitz: The Institute of Christ the King has around 45 priests, and has about 70 seminarians, 10 brothers -- we call them oblates -- and now, about 10 sisters. We have just started a group of sisters last year, and we have five postulants this year. It is located, for the time being, near our international seminary in Florence -- the motherhouse.

We already have two Americans, and soon, three American postulants. Our founder [Msgr. Gilles Wach] said that the sisters will probably soon outgrow the priests, which may give us the possibility of one day returning to the beautiful tradition of having a convent with each apostolate.

Q. When did you begin having nuns?

Msgr. Schmitz: The sisters started officially in 2004. The first three sisters had been trained in the novitiate four years in advance, but the initial inauguration of the archbishop cardinal of Florence was in 2004.

Where Pope St. Pius X Is Lying In State

Q. Many Catholics believe that many self-styled traditional Catholic laymen and priestly fraternities do not pay proper reverence, respect, and obedience to the Pope. Your Fraternity was founded by a sitting Pope, and has a specific unavoidable attachment to St. Peter in your actual name. How do you react to those who accuse traditional Catholics of lacking respect for the Pope?

Fr. Gabet: We had all the benefits of Pope John Paul II and his 25 years. I was in Rome at his 25th anniversary, and was blessed to be able to offer the Traditional Latin Mass on top of the altar of where Pope St. Pius X is entombed in St. Peter's Basilica. It was really such an honor.

Our tour guide really didn't have the permission. The night before, he mentioned that [it was going to be at St. Pius' tomb], and I asked him, "Do they know it is going to be the Latin Mass?" Because I had heard that with a certain cardinal who had been the prefect there -- he just would not allow it at all [in St. Peter's]. And so, the tour guide turned to me and said, "What's the difference?" I tossed and turned all night.

[I'm thinking,] we are going to go into St. Peter's Basilica. They are going to kick us out. And I can't say I've been kicked out of better places. But we went in there after beseeching the Blessed Mother all night and praying before with the group I was with -- it was the Fraternity of St. Peter's 15th anniversary.

We went in there and the priest came up to us and he looked at my missal, and he said, "This is not Paul VI. This is not Paul VI." And this is my brand new missal, with gilded edges and everything! My mom and dad had just bought it for me because my birthday was around that same time.

So this priest takes my missal and walks off with it. So I thought, "Not only am I going to be kicked out of St. Peter's but I've lost my 1962 missal!" Sergio was our Roman guide there, and I said, "Sergio, what is going on?"

And Sergio looked at me and said, "Oh...it doesn't look good Father. He said he says he has to get you a *special* altar."

"Oh! Okay!" [I thought]. Then, they took me down the nave, and I thought we were going to be down in the crypt. So I was looking and when we passed by those doors with the columns on either side, and we passed by the main altar there, and the baldachin, and by the two side doors, I began thinking, "Is there another door to the crypt? Where are we going?" And we just kept on heading to the front door.

And my thoughts again were, "I'm going to get kicked out." But right before we got the door, he turned right, and went right over to the altar where Pope St. Pius X is lying in state.
It was just unbelievable! My heart just stopped! It was great!