

PAIX LITURGIQUE

Letter 71 published 23 May 2016

THE WITNESS OF AN EXEMPLARY 'SILENT ONE'

In our last letter we related the incredible story of Capt. Richard 'Dick' Stratton's last Latin Mass in Hanoi one evening in December 1967, while he was a prisoner of the Vietcong. Providence allowed us to find Capt. Stratton, and his internet savvy and kindness did the rest. This puts us in a position to offer you today his exclusive testimonial on his return to weekly Sunday Mass in 1973, at a time when the liturgical reform had profoundly altered the form of worship he had been deprived of for most of his detention.

This testimonial is a perfect illustration of what we call the “Silent Ones,” i.e. those Catholics who are shocked by the conciliar reforms yet remain faithful to their parish. In our survey campaigns of 2009-2011, these silent ones clearly expressed (at between 40% and 60% of practicing Catholics) their intention to participate in the extraordinary form of the Roman Rite if it were celebrated in THEIR parish.

Image: rs20160521100748_stratton98.jpg

Capt. Richard Dick Stratton in 1998.

I - REFLECTIONS ON THE NEW MASS

“. . . *Pater dimitte illis non enim sciunt quid faciunt.*”

(“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Luke 23:34)

After seven year's absence from the United States and six of those years in prison, I was totally out of touch with the state of the Roman Catholic Church. Upon my return I was totally confused by the total deconstruction of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the denuding of the traditional church interiors, the sermons devoid of any mention of sin, accountability, penance or restitution, the casual manhandling of the Holy Eucharist and the reduction of the Sacred Priesthood to the status of master of ceremonies at a three ring circus.

The Navy and my family had provided all kinds of care and attention to facilitate my reentry into society, my profession and my family. The Church provided no assistance whatsoever. Looking back on the state of flux that the Church was in, such an omission was not surprising as the Church itself had no coherent explanation of the implosion of Catholicism. The end result was that I concentrated my time and energy on my family and resumption of my career. I had internalized my faith while in jail so I persisted with what had served me so well for six years.

I could make no sense of the rationale behind the changes to the liturgy beyond the obvious, but mistaken, desire to popularize the liturgy in the vernacular. The New Mass did not speak to me; I could not relate to it; in fact, it repelled me by bringing up what the European Protestants had accomplished in destroying the Catholic Mass from Luther and Henry's time. My Catholic worship had become a Protestant meeting; my churches, Protestant meeting houses. The fact that attendance at Sunday Mass in the United States has fallen by 50% since Vatican II shows me that I am not alone in my angst. The profanation of the Church calendar was beyond belief.

Having no choice in 1973 but to fulfill my Sunday obligation since I had three boys 7, 9 and 11 to bring up in the Faith, I sought a *modus vivendi*. Examining the wreck of the New Mass I could find the “Consecration” still 99% intact; so I could actually meet my Mass obligation by focusing on that segment of the current process. The rest of the surrounding distractions were easily handled by intentionally going into a state of “disassociation” which I learned to do while being interrogated and/or abused in jail. In sum, I would consider the Sunday event to be my weekly penance to atone for my many sins.

Very frankly, I felt that the institution of the Catholic Church had turned its back on me. As a result, I went into a survival mode. I knew nothing of any of the “Traditionalist” movements including Archbishop Lefebvre. I did not hear of the 1988 *Ecclesia Dei* motu proprio. The American Church did not inform me and I chose not to inform myself. A pox on both our houses!

Upon retirement from my second career as a Clinical Social Worker in 2001, I decided to devote my time to study the available literature surrounding Vatican II. In the process I identified the “Traditionalist” movements finding that I identified them more than the Vatican leadership until Pope Benedict. I discovered that there was one church in my city, Jacksonville FL, that offered each Sunday a Tridentine Low Mass and once a month a High Mass. I attended faithfully as long as my health permitted. My return to the true Mass was like a glass of cool fresh water after a week's survival exercise in the desert. It was a natural. Such attendance caused no problems within the family. My actions paled into insignificance in the face of the female relative who decided to go through a heretical ordination ritual to become a catholic woman priest. [She currently is active in the mid-western United States.]

Unfortunately, Pope Benedict's *Summorum Pontificum* motu proprio has made no impact in my diocese. It certainly received no acknowledgement or publicity. Those of us who love the Latin Mass have been totally marginalized as revanchists, victims of nostalgia, or in some way mentally ill. I firmly believe that the *Novus Ordo Missae* will pass into history to be regarded as an aberration bordering on heresy like the Albigensian.

In the meantime, I revert to the lessons learned in 1951 from Novice Master Fr. Charles Costello OMI on how to meditate and how to pray the rosary in such a manner that it embodies the totality of my Roman Catholic Faith. This served me well for six years in the seminary, six years in prison and the thirty-five years wandering in the wilderness of the *Novus Ordo*.

Richard A. Stratton MA, MSW

Atlantic Beach FL USA

January 27, 2016

St. John Chrysostom

II - COMMENTARY OF PAIX LITURGIQUE

1) Born in 1931 near Boston, Dick Stratton received a Catholic education in a family that had been seared by the experience of the Great Depression in the 1930s. His parish church was burning down one morning as he was going to his high school; this brought home to him how strongly he was attached to his faith and led him to enter the Oblates of Mary Immaculate Seminary in Newburgh, NY, and then to study philosophy in Washington. On the evening before pronouncing his vows, he understood that his vocation laid elsewhere. He put an end to his studies at Georgetown University and joined the Navy where his father had fought in World War One and where his brother was serving at the time.

2) Before agreeing to give us his testimony, **Captain Stratton insisted on pointing out that his rediscovery of the traditional Mass was nothing extraordinary** as it was much like “getting back on a bicycle, coming home after a mission, or finding and putting back on a favorite pair of gloves: something completely natural.” Yet for close on thirty years he lived without his bicycle, coming home, or his gloves. “I have three sons who have since given me six granddaughters. They don't listen to what I may say, but they pay close attention to all I may do, or not do. That's why I kept attending Mass faithfully in my parish every single Sunday and holy day of obligation after my release, even though I no longer recognized the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Today they all keep the faith, or at least that taught since Vatican II.”

3) **Dick Stratton used the same technique to resist the new Mass as he had used to resist the Viet Cong: disconnecting himself from the hostile environment in which he found himself and concentrating on what really mattered to him.** Better yet, to give this painful Sunday Mass attendance some meaning he offered it up as penance for his sins; this was an application of the spiritual warfare techniques he had learned in his youth. This is the principal strong point of this testimony, which is representative of so many others: everything happens as though grace were being transmitted by the new liturgy but despite the new liturgy. “Grace seeps or streams,” wrote François Mauriac, “through the rubble of the destroyed liturgy.”

4) The shame of it, as Captain Stratton says, is that the churches have emptied out since the reform of Vatican II. To be sure, the liturgical reform alone must not shoulder all of the blame: rampant secularization contributed as well. Yet at the very least the reform clearly did not stem the hemorrhage of practicing Catholics. **A testimony like this one points to a stinging failure.** In any well-managed organization a catastrophic situation would be assessed, lessons learned from wrong-headed orientations, and the means to remedy the situation would be taken. Except when—for example in the political sphere—disaster flows from ideological premises: then the policy is a headlong rush without looking back. That's clearly the case here too.

5) Despite his uncompromising judgment on the reformed liturgy (“I firmly believe that the *Novus Ordo Missae* will pass into history to be regarded as an aberration bordering on heresy”), **Dick Stratton seems never to have deemed it appropriate to reveal his discontent, or even his opposition, to his pastor;** he preferred to turn his suffering into an occasion of Redemption. In this sense, his testimony fits perfectly with that of another “silent one” we spoke of in a French edition of our Letters: once the new Mass was ushered in, this Catholic man in Burgundy continued to attend his parish Mass while still using his traditional missal! Both in Florida and in Burgundy therefore, one can observe the same attachment of the “silent ones” to the Sunday Mass celebrated in THEIR OWN parish. **This makes it easier to understand how so many pastors know nothing of those faithful laymen who silently continue to participate in their parish life without**

sharing in its upheavals.