

Should I Assist at a Mass That Names Benedict XVI in the Canon?

by the Rev. Anthony Cekada

ONE HOT TOPIC discussed on traditionalist forums during the past few years is whether traditional Catholics should assist at Masses in which the priest mentions the name of Benedict XVI in the first prayer of the Canon.

These Masses are sometimes referred to as “*una cum* Masses,” because the Latin phrase into which the name of a reigning pope is inserted reads: *una cum famulo tuo Papa nostro N. (together with Thy servant N., our Pope)*

Now, those of us who have arrived at a correct understanding of the actual situation in the Church — so-called “*sedevacantists*” — affirm that Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) is a heretic, and therefore no true pope. So, on the face of it, it makes no sense whatsoever for us to participate in a Mass where, a few moments before the consecration, the priest proclaims that Ratzinger is *Papa nostro* — “OUR pope.”

In many parts of the world, however, the only traditional Latin Mass available may be one offered by a priest (Motu, Society of St. Pius X or independent) who puts the false pope’s name in the Canon. Faced with choosing this or nothing, a layman is sometimes tempted to assist at the Mass anyway. Why not simply overlook Benedict’s name in the Canon, and “just go for the Mass”?

To answer this question, I turned to the writings of pre-Vatican II liturgists, canonists and theologians, as well as to various papal pronouncements and decrees. This is where we priests are *supposed* to look for answers, rather than just relying on gut, personal opinion and shooting from the hip.

Based on that research, I wrote a lengthy study entitled “The Grain of Incense: Sedevacantists and *Una Cum* Masses” and published it about a year ago.

My answer (roughly) was this: No, you can’t just “overlook” Benedict’s name in the Canon of a traditional Mass. It affirms that he is a true pope, and by actively assisting at such a Mass, you participate in that false affirmation. Since you *know* he’s not the pope, this is sinful.

I provide all the theological documentation for that answer in “Grain of Incense.” But since reading a long article is not every traditionalist’s cup of tea (even if I do slide a few wisecracks into the footnotes...), I decided to write this short resumé of my arguments.

I. What Does the “*Una Cum*” Prayer Mean?

THERE ARE TWO ways of looking at this: *linguistic* meaning (What do the grammar, terms and context mean?) and *theological* meaning (What *doctrines* does it express?).

(a) **Linguistically.** From this perspective, putting Ratzinger’s name into the *una cum* in the Canon affirms that he is a *true pope* (“our pope”). Obviously, we reject that.

It also affirms that Ratzinger is a *member of the true Church*, because his name is mentioned in the prayer for the Church.

We reject this too. For the very basis of our position is the teaching of canonists and theologians that *loss of membership in the Church* effects the automatic loss of the pontificate in a heretical pope. Heresy in a pope puts him outside the Church and thus out of office.

(b) **Theologically (Doctrinally).** In “Grain of Incense” I summarized the standard theological meanings that various theologians, canonists and liturgists assigned to the *una cum* phrase in the Canon.

When we plug Ratzinger’s name into the prayer and apply these meanings to that phrase, here is what results:

- The heretic/false pope Ratzinger is “the head of the Church, the vicar of Christ, and the successor of blessed Peter.”

- The acknowledgment of the heretic/false pope Ratzinger in the Canon is “the chief and most glorious form of communion” with him, “the profession of a mind and will which firmly espouses Catholic unity.”

- The inclusion of the name of the heretic/false pope Ratzinger in the Canon specifies him as “the principle of unity.”

- Mentioning the name of the heretic/false pope Ratzinger in the Canon is a sign that you “are not separated from communion with the universal church.”

- The mention of the name of the heretic/false Pope Ratzinger in the Canon “is a proof of the orthodoxy of the offerer.”

- The heretic/false pope Ratzinger is the “ruling Pontiff, the visible pastor and the authorized intermediary with almighty God for the various members of his flock.”

Since we are logical about the situation in the Church — Ratzinger is a heretic and no pope — these propositions are ridiculous.

Yet they are what results when a priest professes in the Canon that he offers the traditional Mass *una cum* — *together with Thy servant Benedict, our Pope.*

II. Can’t I “Withhold My Consent”?

THE PRIEST at an *una cum* Mass, of course, is the one who utters the objectionable phrase. Couldn’t the man in the pew who objects to it simply “withhold his consent” from that part of the Canon, but still assist at the Mass otherwise in order to fulfill his obligation or obtain sacramental graces?

Well, no. To fulfill your Sunday obligation or obtain sacramental graces at Mass requires *active* assistance or participation. This is an all-or-nothing proposition. You either actively assist or you don’t.

In “Grain of Incense,” I listed at least nine ways in which a Catholic actively assists at a traditional Mass when it is celebrated. Each of these is a true form of active assistance or participation, and according to

Catholic teaching constitutes “cooperation or common action with another in the prayers and functions of worship.”

I quoted various popes and pre-Vatican II theologians who taught that the laity who assist actively at Mass, in so doing, manifest their consent and moral cooperation with the priest as he offers the sacrifice. (Indeed, moral unity with the priest is required to fulfill the Sunday obligation.)

Finally, I demonstrated that the **Fathers of the Church**, and indeed **Pope Pius XII** himself in the Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, **teach specifically that the faithful who actively assist at Mass ratify, assent to and participate in the prayers of the Canon that the priest recites**, even though they do not vocally recite these prayers themselves.

So, there is no way for you to avoid it. The same active assistance at Mass required for fulfilling your Sunday obligation also inextricably joins you to the action of a priest at the altar. So, when he proclaims during the Canon that he offers the sacrifice *together with Thy servant Benedict, our Pope* — the arch-heretic and false pope Ratzinger, his prayer is *your* prayer.

III. What is Wrong with Participating?

In “Grain of Incense,” I answered this question at great length. I demonstrated that, once you have figured out the real situation in the Church — that Ratzinger is not a true pope — but actively assist at an *una cum* Mass nevertheless, by that fact you:

- (1) Tell a pernicious lie.
- (2) Profess communion with heretics.
- (3) Recognize as legitimate the Ecumenical, One-World Church.
- (4) Implicitly profess a false religion.
- (5) Condone a violation of Church law.
- (6) Participate in a sin.
- (7) Offer Mass in union with the heretic/false pope Ratzinger.
- (8) Recognize the usurper of an ecclesiastical office.
- (9) Offer an occasion for the sin of scandal.
- (10) In the case of Masses offered by “resistance” clergy (SSPX, its affiliates and many independent clergy) participate in gravely illicit Masses and condone the sin of schism.

Such acts are not ones you want to have on your conscience.

And the foregoing conclusions, I assure you, are not merely the product of my own personal whims and musings. They are based on the teachings of the various canonists, moralists, theologians, and papally-approved decrees I cite and quote in my original article.

IV. Objections, Please...

FINALLY IN “Grain of Incense,” I listed ten (10) anticipated objections to my argument, and, based on various theological sources, responded to each.

Here, I will recap only the more common ones and offer a brief response. For a fuller explanation, once again, see the article.

(a) **My Sunday obligation takes precedence?** False. There are many legitimate causes that excuse from this.

Active assistance at an *una cum* Mass implicates you in (among other things) the recognition of the false church and religion of Vatican II. Obviously, that constitutes “notable spiritual harm” — one of the conditions that excuse Catholics from the Sunday obligation.

(b) **The priest “means well”?** Irrelevant. This does not change what the *una cum* means or the fact that you participate in it. The priest may not know any better — but *you* certainly know better.

(c) **“Sedevacantist” priests have different opinions?** These opinions are only as good as the reasons behind them, and from what I’ve seen, these are mostly off the cuff reactions. But theology, not gut, has to be the basis for addressing such an important issue.

If any priest disagrees with my conclusions in “Grain of Incense,” I invite him to research the issue in the various sources I cited, and then offer a point-by-point refutation of my arguments. (No one, please note, has done this so far.) Until then, I am confident that my arguments and conclusions stand.

(d) **My family and I will lose the graces of the Mass and thus the faith itself?** I will be blunt: You can obtain NO graces at a Mass where you knowingly and actively participate in a sacrilegious lie that affirms the legitimacy of the false hierarchy and religion of Vatican II.

And as for your children, the crypto-modernism of the Motu Mass clergy — even if you do get the “good” ciborium with the validly-consecrated hosts — or the poisonous errors of SSPX on the papacy will eventually corrupt your children’s faith. In three decades as a priest, I have seen many families that were once solidly traditionalist surrender step by step to the new religion because of a decision to go to a “convenient” *una cum* Mass.

Don’t take the first step on that path.

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VATICAN II and the post-Conciliar “popes,” as we know, have sought to create a dogma-less, ecumenical, one-world religion — a big tent for all religions, under which each is regarded as more or less good.

There’s a place for you in this circus, even if you are “attached” to the traditional Latin Mass. All you have to do is recognize Ratzinger as your ringmaster

This is what you do when you actively assist at a Mass in which the priest — Motu, FSSP, SSPX, or independent — proclaims in the Canon that he offers Mass *together with Thy servant, Benedict, our Pope and all true believers and professors of the Catholic and Apostolic Faith*.

Better to have no Mass at all, than partake in such a blasphemy. Better to die than offer this grain of incense to the ecumenical religion of the anti-Christ.

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Note: “The Grain of Incense” can be downloaded from the Articles page of www.traditionalmass.org. Those without web access can obtain a free printed copy from St. Gertrude the Great Church, 4900 Rialto Road, West Chester OH 45069, 513.645.4212