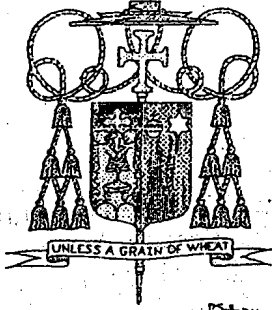


Clarification for our parishioners –from Bishop Vasa 2004



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To the Dear People of God of Klamath County:

After reading the article in the February 15, 2004 issue of the Herald and News regarding the celebration of an unauthorized Latin Mass at Keno it was clear to me that I needed to try to clarify matters so that the faithful are not misled. The article concerned Latin Masses being offered at Keno by a priest member of The Society of Saint Pius X. The Society was founded in 1970 by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre.

The Society of Saint Pius X, for all its devotion and good intentions, has, in fact, rejected any and all affiliation with the Church at Rome headed by Pope John Paul II. The article rightly points out that in 1976 "Rome suspended Lefebvre, and the Society is now said to be in schism". Schism is the withdrawal of submission to the Supreme Pontiff or from communion with the members of the Church subject to him. (Canon 751) A "schismatic" -- one who refuses such submission or who withdraws from such communion -- incurs the penalty of automatic excommunication. (Canon 1364). These are strong words and they are deliberately strong because wounds to the unity of the Church are serious. In the 1600's, Martin Luther, then an Augustinian Catholic priest, found that he had lost confidence in the ability of the Catholic Church to respond to the grace of the Holy Spirit. He struck out on his own, citing numerous errors in the Church, and established his own church. Many of his complaints and concerns had merit but in trying to deal with his concerns he forgot that Jesus promised that He would be with His Church all days until the end of the world and that His Church is guided by the Holy Spirit.

There are many faithful Catholics who have concerns about reverence in the Liturgy, reverence in Church and the loss of some of some of the Mystery affiliated with the former Latin Mass. There were and are Liturgical abuses which are gradually being corrected. These are legitimate concerns but the way to address them is not the abandonment of the Pope and the abandonment of the teaching authority of the Church but rather the establishment of a deeper trust and confidence in Jesus who established this Church and the Holy Spirit who leads it. I, for one, have a tremendous confidence in the Holy Father.

Unfortunately the members of the Society of Saint Pius X have no such confidence. In their view, they have no Pope. Priests of the Society of Saint Pius X formally adhere to the schism effected by the ordination of four bishops by the late Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre in 1988; something he was explicitly forbidden to do so by the Holy See. Priests who have affiliated with Archbishop Lefebvre are no longer in union with the Catholic Church, having also incurred the sentence of excommunication.

Since the members of the Society have rejected union with the Holy Father, no Catholic may attend or participate in Masses offered by priests of the Society of Saint Pius X, such as those celebrated at Saint Therese Chapel in Keno, without embracing the same schism which the Society itself embraces. No Catholic may legitimately attend Mass at Saint Therese Chapel and at the same time continue to claim to remain in full communion with the Catholic Church. Since members of the Society reject the validity of the Mass we celebrate in various languages it is not possi-

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ble for them to attend Mass and receive Communion in the Churches recognized by the Diocese. Cutting themselves off from union with the Pope means also cutting themselves off from union with the Bishop and the Diocese.

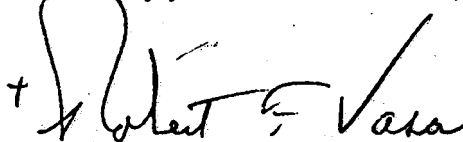
All Catholics must fulfill the grave duty of remaining united to the Vicar of Christ in the unity of the Catholic Church. Associating with and supporting individuals and organizations which persist in willful disobedience to the Holy Father is a serious offense against God and the intrinsic unity of the Mystical Body of Christ.

I recognize the desire of some people to have a Latin Mass option available and The Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter is a group recognized and accepted by the Church for such purposes. I do not have the resources to have a member of the Priestly Fraternity serving full time in the Diocese and the expansiveness of the Diocese makes it impossible for me to provide such a priest for the very sparse and scattered individuals who may occasionally desire participation in a Latin Mass. I continue to be open to the possibility of inviting the Priestly Fraternity but I can do so only for those persons who show a fidelity to the Holy Father. Persons who have abandoned the Catholic Church and the Diocese, as indicated by their affiliation with a schismatic group, would have to renounce such membership and manifest a firm desire to work with me to re-establish unity. The newspaper article indicates that the people involved "met for two years in Keno to pray for a priest to come". Unfortunately the Bishop was not included or asked to be a part of that discussion or prayer.

In July of 1988 Pope John Paul II, in his Apostolic Letter *Ecclesia Dei afflictia*, wrote: "I wish especially to make an appeal both solemn and heartfelt, paternal and fraternal, to all those who until now have been linked in various ways to the movement of Archbishop Lefebvre (the Society of Saint Pius X), that they may fulfill the grave duty of remaining united to the Vicar of Christ in the unity of the Catholic Church, and of ceasing their support in any way for that movement. Everyone should be aware that formal adherence to the schism is a grave offence against God and carries the penalty of excommunication decreed by the Church's law (Canon 1364)."

This letter in no way condemns those who hunger for the Latin Mass or who have fond memories of it. I have the utmost respect for that hunger and those memories. I also recognize, however, that this hunger is truly a hunger for Jesus and despite the change of language and liturgy we believe that Jesus is still made present, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in our Eucharistic Sacrifice. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass still puts us in contact with the saving actions of Jesus and we can still meet Jesus there. We can and must continue to work to deepen our appreciation for the great gift of the Mass and to foster an ever deepening reverence in the context of that Sacred Liturgy. This, I believe, can be well accomplished without abandoning union with the Holy Father or with the Church.

Sincerely yours in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert F. Vasa". To the left of the signature is a small cross symbol (+).

The Most Reverend Robert F. Vasa
Bishop of Baker