

FR. CAMURATI'S CORNER

10/10/2021

A question, from a parishioner: *why do we only light the candles by the Tabernacle on Sundays?* It's a good question. Short answer, if you feel like skipping the rest of this corner? I don't know for sure. It's done because we do it here. You want a fuller answer, you say? Or your money back? Okay, here it goes:

Back before the Liturgical Reform after the Second Vatican Council, there were rules upon rules upon rules with this sort of thing. There was a distinction between Masses where everything was sung (called "Sung Masses") and Masses where everything was recited (called "Low Masses"). I still largely keep this distinction, as you probably know—I figure if you are singing, I should be able to sing. I still keep it under an hour, after all. And plenty in the pews kept that distinction too, as do (I imagine) some of you. Some Catholics couldn't imagine Sunday Mass without singing. Others like the peaceful recitation of Mass without too much fuss. Both are fine, and great, and beautiful, but it's led to some confusion.

The reason flexibility was introduced after the reform was in case someone on the roster wasn't "up to snuff", you keep as much solemnity as possible while not forcing the tone-deaf priest to chant the preface every week. Unfortunately, many have read this flexibility (often called "progressive solemnity" in Church documents) to mean that we should assume the bare minimum, because doing more is asking more of people. Even back in the day, many Catholics preferred the Low Mass because it was shorter. But sometimes, we need to have the vision to see when "the whole megillah" is warranted for the occasion. "The whole megillah", incidentally, refers to the Jewish holidays that called for a service in which one would read a whole book of the Bible. Megillah means small scroll, so on certain days they hear the whole thing.

But we're a long way off from candles, no? Low Masses would have two candles. Moderately important feasts and occasions would have four candles lit. And sung Masses on Sundays, and feast days, would have 6. This didn't stop some parishes from buying out every beekeeper in Christendom and lighting every candle they could get their hands on, but it did show how that "progressive solemnity" is something we all carry with us. I don't think anyone is raring for each morning Mass to go 55 minutes with "the whole megillah". But our little gesture signifies the importance of Sunday to us—that the weekly celebration of the Lord's Resurrection is the foundation of the spiritual life, and of our common life in the parish. That's quite a bit said over two candles, but also quite a bit that two candles can say.

Fr. Leo