

## One Eucharistic Sacrifice, Many Rites

### *Part 2 in a catechetical series on the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite*

When we use the word “rite,” typically we are referring to a particular liturgical function such as the “Rite of Baptism” or the “Rite of Confirmation.” In a similar way, we use this word when we refer to an isolated action within a more complex liturgy; for example: the “Penitential Rite” and the “Rite of Holy Communion” are two of the many parts which make up the Liturgy of the Eucharist. When used in this sense, “rite” is just another way of saying “ritual.”

But there is another sense in which we speak of “Rites”—a sense which goes far beyond a single ritual action and which encompasses *all* the rituals, traditions and spirituality of a particular people-group within the Catholic Church. The best expression of this sense of the word is found in the *Code of Canon Law for the Eastern Churches* (c. 28, § 1): “A rite is the liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary patrimony, culture and circumstances of history of a distinct people, by which its own manner of living the faith is manifested in each Autonomous Church.”

Believe it or not, today there are no less than *twenty-three* autonomous (self-governing) churches in full union with the Supreme Pontiff, the Bishop of Rome! This may seem confusing at first because, after all, doesn’t the Creed teach that we believe in “*one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church*”? Indeed, Christ founded one Church—his Mystical Body and his Bride—and appointed St. Peter and his successors to be her supreme head on earth and center of unity. But as the Church spread throughout the world, she acquired various customs and traditions from the peoples and nations she embraced—while always preserving the integrity of the True Faith handed down from the Apostles. Thus, within the one Church of Christ, there are many particular churches: the *Latin Church* to which we belong (sometimes called the Western Church), and 22 distinct *Eastern Churches* in union with the Pope.\* A distinguishing feature of each of these churches is the Rite (in its broader sense) to which it adheres. The Eastern Churches use several Rites in many variations and languages. These include the Alexandrian Rite, the Antiochene Rite, the Armenian Rite, the Chaldean Rite, and the Constantinopolitan (Byzantine) Rite.

The Latin Church (by far the largest of the autonomous churches) has been home to a multitude of Rites down through the centuries. Most of these Rites, belonging to a particular locale or religious order, are all but forgotten. But even today, there are five distinct Rites still in use in the Latin Church: the Ambrosian Rite (used in the Diocese of Milan), the Braga Rite (found in Portugal), the Carthusian Rite (practiced in the monasteries of that order), the Mozarabic Rite (only celebrated in the cathedral of Toledo, Spain), and—last but not least—the Roman Rite.

The Roman Rite is the most common and the most familiar of all the Catholic Rites. Its principal language is Latin, but it is celebrated in numerous languages around the world. It has a long and venerable history, dating back to the very beginnings of Christianity. And today, it has the unique privilege of existing in two equal but distinct Forms. Next time, we will give a brief overview of the history and development of the Roman Rite and begin to explore the two Forms in which it is celebrated.

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\* Here we are *not* referring to the Orthodox Churches which, although following similar liturgical traditions and possessing valid sacraments, nevertheless are *not* in union with Rome.