

SSPX Masses an ‘Abuse’ of Eucharist

U.S. Bishops Continue to Urge Catholics Not to Attend

by Kate Quiñones

U.S. bishops continue to instruct Catholics to separate themselves from the schismatic Society of St. Pius X (SSPX) while urging the society's members to return to full communion with the Catholic Church. The Vatican declared July 2 that six prelates involved in the SSPX's unauthorized July 1 episcopal consecrations incurred automatic excommunication. Despite repeated warnings, SSPX bishops consecrated four new bishops without a pontifical mandate — an act of open disobedience to the authority of the pope that carries automatic excommunication for the six bishops involved.

Lay faithful who formally adhere to SSPX are also considered schismatic and can incur excommunication by continuing to attend SSPX services after the Church's formal pronouncement of a schism. Various Catholic bishops with SSPX locations in their dioceses are explicitly forbidding Catholics from attending SSPX Masses, instructing them to avoid the now-illicit sacraments and to withdraw their children from SSPX-affiliated schools while also urging frequent attendees and SSPX priests to seek spiritual guidance and return to the Catholic Church.

Abuse of the Eucharist

Bishop Michael Burbidge of Arlington, Virginia, instructed Catholics to “avoid participating in the activities of the SSPX.” Bishop Burbidge emphasized in a July 8 letter to his flock that “as a result of the SSPX's schismatic act, any celebrations of the sacraments of confession and matrimony by the SSPX are invalid, and the administration of other sacraments is illicit.”

Bishop John Iffert of Covington, Kentucky, explained what it means for these sacraments to be “illicit.” He said: “This means that the celebrations are not permitted by the law of the Church and the cleric offering the sacrament commits the canonical and moral fault of disobedience in each instance.”

“The Masses these priests celebrate are an abuse of the Eucharist, insofar as they make the sacrament of unity into an occasion of division within the Church, and so they should be firmly rejected and avoided by all the Catholic faithful,” Iffert said. “Together with the priests of the diocese, I invite all Catholics who have been attending the SSPX liturgy to practice their faith in one of the parishes, missions, or chapels of the diocese,” Iffert said. “You will find the Catholic Mass and the sacramental life celebrated faithfully and respectfully throughout the Diocese of Covington.”

Who is in schism?

Bishop Burbidge clarified that not all attendees of SSPX are necessarily in schism but must simply return to sacraments and ministries in union with the Church. “I encourage any persons locally who have been attached to the SSPX and who desire the spiritual nourishment of the Church and the extraordinary form of the Mass to become active in any one of the eight locations in our diocese where this is currently possible,” Bishop Burbidge said.

“Although lay faithful who formally adhere to the SSPX are considered schismatic and excommunicated, this does not apply to lay faithful ‘who do not reject the magisterium or the authority of the Roman pontiff’ and have engaged with the SSPX for solely liturgical or spiritual reasons. Such persons must simply resolve not to continue to participate in future SSPX sacramental worship or pastoral ministries,” Bishop Burbidge said. “The Holy See, in the spirit of conciliation, has outlined the procedure necessary for SSPX priests and lay faithful to return to Catholic communion,” Bishop Burbidge explained.

Bishop Manuel de Jesús Rodríguez of Palm Beach, Florida, issued a decree reiterating the Holy See's excommunication and instructing the faithful to separate from SSPX in any “ecclesiastical ministry” or “diocesan entity.” Bishop Rodríguez also provided instructions for any Catholics who wish to leave SSPX “and enter into full communion with the Catholic Church.”

How SSPX's schism affects education

The schismatic acts of SSPX have a trickle-down effect, even affecting the education of children. In Covington, Kentucky, two schools are affiliated with SSPX. Bishop Iffert has instructed Catholics to withdraw their children from the schools due to the schismatic nature of the group.

"Because Assumption Academy and Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Academy are associated with the SSPX, Catholic parents should not enroll their children in these schools," Bishop Iffert said in a letter. "To do so is to entrust the religious formation of children to those who participate in schism against the Roman Catholic Church." He encouraged parents to reach out to the diocesan Catholic schools office for "appropriate placement in a local Catholic school."

Praying for return

The bishops prayed for union and for society members to return to the Church. "I pledge to pray for the bishops and priests of the SSPX and for their faithful return to regular order in the Catholic Church," Bishop Iffert said. "I also assure the lay faithful who have been attached to the SSPX of my prayer for their good and for the restoration of unity in the Church."

Bishop Burbidge prayed especially for SSPX priests. "To my brother priests in the SSPX, please know of my prayers for you and my heartfelt desire for your return to full communion with the Church," Bishop Burbidge said. "I invite all the faithful to join me in prayer for the end of all division and schism and for the unity of the Church, so that she may better fulfill the divine commission to make disciples of all nations."

I ask all faithful Catholics to pray for restored unity and order in the Church and in our diocese," Bishop Iffert said. "Please beg the intercession of Pope St. Pius X, that his name may always give glory to God and never be a sign of division in the Eucharistic community that he cherished."

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