

Trendy services are a turn-off for young lured by Latin Mass

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Will Pavia New York

In an era of declining religious faith and dwindling mass attendance, a Catholic church in Detroit boasts a booming congregation.

St Joseph Shrine attributes this success not to a charismatic priest or brilliant social media, but rather its decision to hold daily masses in Latin.

“People find [the new rite] too breezy, too informal, so there is this movement to go back to the older rite,” John Baldovin, a Jesuit priest at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, said. Younger people seeking out a distinct Catholic identity flocked to Latin masses, he said. “It’s a reaction of many of the young to the chaos of the times.”

However, he said the return to the Latin mass could also be part of a backlash against “the reformed vision of the church itself in Vatican II [in 1962-65].”

St Joseph Shrine is one of hundreds of churches across America offering the traditional Latin mass, defying the Pope, who has sought to limit its use. Francis has suggested that it represents a threat to unity in the church and adherence to the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, which encouraged mass in the vernacular, led by priests who faced their congregation, instead of facing the altar.

Its revival has been tied to a conservative strain within American Catholicism. Some observers have compared its focus, on returning to an older form of worship, to Donald Trump’s rallying cry to Make America Great Again.

Though it might not be immediately evident “the implication is against regarding the Jews as your brothers and sisters, of thinking other religions are going to hell ... you are against real

fellowship with other churches,” Baldovin said. Last year the Pew Research Center reported that 63 per cent of white Catholics who attended Mass at least once a month supported Trump in the 2020 presidential election.

They might be dismayed at “the sloppiness and casual nature of the way the current mass is being celebrated”, or nostalgic “for times gone by when everything was nicer — which is not true”, Baldovin said. “There is a certain way in which [the Latin mass] appeals to a religious instinct for reverence, which the new religious rite does not.”

While Pope Benedict XVI had broadened access to the Latin mass, Francis has sought to limit it. The greatest resistance to his directive appears to have come in the US, where the Latin mass is offered in 600 churches, according to The New York Times.

While some bishops have sought to limit the use of the traditional mass, Archbishop Allen Vigneron is said to have allowed it to flourish in Detroit. It “brings the true Catholics out”, Kristin Kopy, 41, a member of the congregation at Old St Mary’s Church in the city, said. “I don’t speak Latin. But it feels like you’re connecting more with God.”

Taylor Marshall, a podcaster and staunch advocate of the Latin mass, called on American bishops and cardinals to allow for it in a video on his YouTube channel this week.

“Go back to tradition, restore the Roman rite,” he said. “We want our Roman patrimony, as Catholics. I don’t want a father facing me with his microphone and talking about NFL football games. I don’t want ... Karen on the parish council making up prayers to the people. I don’t want to shake people’s hands during mass. No. Let’s just get back to Jesus.”