

A Rorate Mass in May?

by Fr. William Rock, FSSP

It was a dark and stormy night...

...or, rather, early morning, when I awoke. Perhaps it was due to the noise of the storm outside, or maybe it was due to the lack of noise inside. In any case, I felt that something was off. Glancing over, I saw that my plugin alarm clock was blank – the power was out. After checking the fuse box and confirming with my cell phone that it was a regional event, I tried to go back to sleep. This was around, so far as I can remember, 3:30 am. I was unsuccessful in my endeavor to resume my slumber. The power came back on around 4:00. I had planned on getting up at 4:30 anyway since I had the 6:30 Mass that Wednesday, with Confessions starting half an hour beforehand. As the entrance hallway of the Chapel tends to flood in such storms, I decided to get ready and to head over in case any cleanup was needed.

When I arrived at the Chapel, there was at least one wet footprint and a large squeegee was out. I deduced that the Pastor had already be there. As the entrance hallway was relatively dry, I went to my office to pray the Hour of Matins (equivalent to the Office of Readings in the Liturgy of the Hours) from the Breviary, which I was planning on praying before Mass that morning anyway (typically, on the weekdays, Lauds [Morning Prayer] is prayed in common with my pastor after the morning Mass). After Matins, I began my spiritual reading, the final volume of Mary of Agreda's City of God, but the power went out again. As the emergency lighting was not well-suited for reading, I decided it was best to do something else. Equipped with my cell phone and its flashlight mode, I decided to make my way to the sacristy to prepare for Mass. In addition to the normal items, I set up twin candelabra on the high altar's gradine predicting the morning Mass would have to be done by candlelight. One of the parishioners came into the sacristy to turn the lights on for those gathering to pray the novena to Our Lady of Good Success, a devotion which originated in Quito, Ecuador, in preparation for the parish's patronal feast day on May 31st, the Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary. I informed her that the power was out; the novena went forward by what light could be produced. A little bit later, another parishioner came to the sacristy and brought out a small wooden block with hollows for tealight candles to aid in reading the Missal at the altar.

As I left the confessional to return to the sacristy, the lights were still out. The emergency lights had been failing, their batteries being drained. But, as I began vesting, the power was restored, and the electrical lights jumped to life. The server asked if the extra candles should be lit. I instructed him to do so as the power had already come on and gone out again earlier that morning. As he was lighting the candles, and I continued vesting, the power went out yet again.

The Vigil Mass of the Ascension began by candlelight. Could having an early morning Mass by candlelight not but bring to mind of those gathered to worship the Living and True God the *Rorate* Mass? Named after the first word of the Introit (the entrance chant), this Mass is a traditional candlelight Mass prayed during Advent in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. But it was May 25th and still Eastertide, not a Saturday of Advent.

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Not too far into the Mass, definitely before the Gospel, the power came back, again, for the third time since I had awoken. The candles were left lit, just in case, as it was unknown what would happen. I did, however, place the board of tealights up on the gradine, out of the way, at the start of the Offertory. Having them up there would make it easier to perform the ceremonial actions, but they would be at hand if needed.

But the power and the lights remained on for the duration of the Mass. The storm drama of the day had finally come to an end.

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