



Boston Catholic Journal



NIHIL NISI IESUM

Dedicated to Mary, Mother of God

Salus Animarum Suprema Lex Esto (Canon Law 175)

The Salvation of Souls is the Supreme Law in the Church

Formal Rite of Excommunication



From the Catholic Church

“[Name of the person], led by the Devil, having abandoned through apostasy the promise he had made at his Baptism, has not feared to ravage the Church of God, steal Church goods and violently

oppress the poor of Christ. In our concern over this, we do not desire that he perish because of any pastoral neglect of our own. For before the dread Judgment seat, we will have to render an account to the Prince of Shepherds, Our Lord Jesus Christ, in accordance with the terrible warning the Lord Himself addresses to us with these words: If thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thy hand (Ez 3:18). Therefore, we have canonically warned him once, twice, a third and yet a fourth time so that he might conquer his malice, inviting him to amend himself, make reparation and penance, and reprehending him with paternal affection. But he – o woe! – despising the salutary admonitions of the Church of God, which he has offended, and led by the spirit of pride, has not wanted to make any reparation.

“The precepts of the Lord and of the Apostles speak clearly about what to do with such prevaricators. For the Lord says: Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offends thee, cut them off and cast them from thee (Mt 8:18). And the Apostle advises: If any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or a server of idols, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner: with such a one, do not so much as to eat. (1 Cor 5:11) And John, the favorite disciple of Christ, forbids that one should even greet one who is wicked: If any one come to you and bring not this doctrine, do not receive him into the house, and greet him not (2 Jn 1:10).

“Therefore, carrying out the precepts of the Lord and of the Apostles, let us take from the body of the Church with the iron tongs of excommunication this putrid and incurable member who refuses to accept the remedy, so that the rest of the members of the body may not be poisoned by such a pestiferous disease. He has despised our admonitions and our repeated exhortations; having been warned three times, according to the precept of the Lord, he would not amend himself and do penance; he has not reflected upon his guilt, nor has he confessed it; neither has he presented any excuse through a third

party, nor did he ask for pardon. But, with his heart hardened by the Devil, he continues to persevere in the same evil as before, according to the words of the Apostle: The impenitent heart stores up to itself wrath for the day of wrath (Rom 2:5).

“Wherefore by the judgment of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and Holy Ghost, of the St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles, and of all the Saints, and by virtue of the power which has been given us of binding and loosing in Heaven and on earth that which was divinely entrusted to us, we deprive him [the person is named] with all his accomplices and all his abettors of the Communion of the Body and Blood of Our Lord; we separate him from the society of all Christians; we exclude him from the bosom of our Holy Mother the Church in Heaven and on earth; and we declare him excommunicated and anathematized, as well as judge him condemned to eternal fire with Satan and his angels and all the reprobates. So long as he will not burst the fetters of the Devil, amend himself and do penance and make reparation to the Church which he has offended, we deliver him to Satan for the perdition of his flesh, so that his soul may be saved on the day of judgment.

“To this, all the assistants answer: “Fiat, fiat, fiat” [so be it, so be it, so be it].

“The Bishop and the assisting priests then cast to the ground the lighted candles they have been carrying. Notice is sent in writing to all the priests in the neighboring parishes, as well as to the Bishops, of the name of the one who has been excommunicated and the cause of his excommunication in order that they may have no communication with him, thus removing them from any occasion of excommunication.”

Pontificale Romanum 1962

From *Virgo Sacrata*: <https://www.virgosacrata.com/ordo-excommunicandi-et-absolvendi.html>

“Bell, Book, and Candle” with Ordo Excommunicandi et Absolvendi

Since the time of the apostles, the term ‘anathema’ has come to mean a form of extreme religious sanction, known as excommunication.

The phrase “bell, book, and candle” refers to a Latin Christian method of excommunication by anathema, imposed on a person who had committed an exceptionally grievous sin. Evidently introduced by Pope Zachary around the middle of the 8th century, the rite is used by the Roman Catholic Church.

Anathema is not final damnation. God alone is the judge of the living and the dead, and up until the moment of death repentance is always possible. The purpose of public anathema is twofold: to warn the one condemned and bring about his repentance, and to warn others away from his error. Everything is done for the purpose of the salvation of souls.

The Ritual

The ceremony is described in the Pontificale Romanum, the last edition of the Tridentine Rite published before Vatican II.

The ceremony traditionally involved a bishop, with 12 priests bearing candles, and would solemnly be pronounced in some suitably conspicuous place. The bishop would then pronounce the formula of the anathema, which ends with the following words:

Idcirco eum cum universis
complicibus, fautoribusque suis,
iudicio Dei omnipotentis Patris, et

Wherefore in the name of God the
All-powerful, Father, Son, and
Holy Ghost, of the Blessed Peter,

Filii, et Spiritus Sancti, et beati Petri principis Apostolorum, et omnium Sanctorum, nec non et mediocritatis nostrae auctoritate, et potestate ligandi et solvendi in coelo et in terra nobis divinitus collata, a pretiosi Corporis et Sanguinis Domini perceptione, et a societate omnium Christianorum separamus, et a liminibus sanctae matris Ecclesiae in coelo et in terra excludimus, et excommunicatum et anathematizatum esse decernimus; et damnatum cum diabolo, et angelis eius, et omnibus reprobis in ignem aeternum judicamus; donec a diaboli laqueis resipiscat, et ad emendationem, et poenitentiam redeat, et Ecclesiae Dei, quam laesit, satisfaciat, tradentes eum satanae in interitum carnis, ut spiritus eius salvus fiat in die iudicii.[2]

Prince of the Apostles, and of all the saints, in virtue of the power which has been given us of binding and loosing in Heaven and on earth, we deprive him and all his accomplices and all his abettors of the Communion of the Body and Blood of Our Lord, we separate him from the society of all Christians, we exclude him from the bosom of our Holy Mother the Church in Heaven and on earth, we declare him excommunicated and anathematized and we judge him condemned to eternal fire with Satan and his angels and all the reprobate, so long as he will not burst the fetters of the demon, do penance and satisfy the Church; we deliver him to Satan to mortify his body, that his soul may be saved on the day of judgment.[1]

After this recitation the priests would respond: “Fiat, fiat, fiat” (“So be it! So be it! So be it!”).

The bishop would then ring a bell, close a Holy Book, and he and the assisting priests would snuff out their candles by dashing them to the ground. However, the rite of anathema as described in the Pontificale Romanum only prescribes that the candles be dashed to the ground.

After the ritual, written notices would be sent to the neighbouring bishops and priests to report that the target had been anathematized and why, so that they and their constituents would hold no communication with the target. [2]

The frightful pronouncements of the ritual were calculated so as to strike terror into the ones so excommunicated and bring them to repentance.

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