

Preparing the Way for the Roman Missal

Where the New Translation meets the New Evangelization™

Why a new translation?

Let's begin with some brief historical background:

The First Edition of the Roman Missal (the book containing the prayers, responses and ritual actions used in the celebration) for the Ordinary Form of Holy Mass was promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1969.

Some minor revisions were made in 1975 (leading to the 2nd Edition) and the official Latin language version upon which all other translations are based for the 3rd Edition – the one that we now await in English - was approved by Pope John Paul II in the year 2000. That's right, more than a decade ago!

The actual changes in the Latin text, or *typical edition* of the 3rd Edition of the Roman Missal are relatively few in number; they include things like expanded possibilities for Communion under both species and prayers commemorating those Saints who were canonized in the preceding 25 years.

So why it has taken so long for us to receive the new translation - one that we know will bring with it quite a number of changes in English?

Matters of translation

The previous liturgical translations were carried out using a method ("cutting edge" for its time) called "Dynamic Equivalence." This approach attempted to convey the meaning of the original Latin text apart from its form, with the focus being weighted heavily toward the target audience. The desire was to create a readily approachable text that largely reflected the ordinary "language of the people."

In spite of good intentions, it eventually became clear that this particular approach rendered a liturgical text with considerable deficiencies:

- Occasional loss of theological/doctrinal depth
- The connection between the liturgical text and its principal source, Sacred Scripture, was diminished
- Some of the resulting text was simply incorrect

The power of language

Imagine if you will Abraham Lincoln beginning the Gettysburg Address by saying, "The United States was founded 87 years ago on the assumption that everyone is born with pretty much the same rights as the next guy."

This is essentially the same idea, isn't it? In other words, it's the *dynamic equivalent* of what Lincoln actually said. But if history had recorded and passed along this version of the address, I think we can all agree that our school children probably wouldn't be memorizing it today.

And why not? Because it's not only *what* we say that matters; it's also *how we say things* that determines how people are impacted.

You see, language - in this case the sacred text *properly translated* - has within it great power.

- It has the power to elevate the hearts and minds of the faithful toward God.
- It has the power to move us beyond our present earthly condition in a way that draws us ever more deeply into the timeless realm of *sacred mystery*.
- It has the power to foster within us nothing less than an experience of Divine union!

A two-edged sword

By bringing the language of the Mass "down to earth" as in the earlier editions, the liturgical text can inadvertently have the exact opposite effect as well.

- It can unduly draw our attention to ourselves
- It can serve to hold our feet to here-and-now
- It can even lead to a diminished awareness of Christ's transcendent presence at Holy Mass.

It's hindsight at this point, of course, but it only makes sense; as our language at Holy Mass grew more ordinary and more everyday, so too did our *view* and our *experience* of the sacred liturgy.

Recovering lost treasure

Over time, the poorly translated text of the first and second editions of the Missal contributed to a liturgical environment in which our “sense of the sacred” has been diminished. Holy Mother Church, recognizing the need to recover what has been lost, called for a more faithful translation to be carried out; one that might better draw the People of God into the gift of Divine union that is offered in the Mass.

This required the English speaking bishops of the world and the many experts who assisted them to examine *all* of the liturgical texts in the the Roman Missal – 3rd Edition, not just those relatively few parts that had changed, so that improvements or corrections could be made as needed in order to restore accuracy and *recover a sense of the sacred*.

To say the least, this was a substantial undertaking, one that could not be rushed. Pope John Paul II cautioned the bishops in 2002, warning that translating the liturgical texts in a hurried way is like running across a room with a cup full of coffee: Sure, you can reach the other side pretty quickly, but half of the contents will have been lost!

This is why it has taken 10 years - thanks be to God, our Bishops didn't spill the coffee! Does this mean that the text we're about to receive will never have need of further improvement?

Of course not, as a Pilgrim Church journeying toward Heavenly perfection there's always going to be room for future growth, but a tremendous gift is coming our way nonetheless and we have every reason to be excited about it. *We are on the verge of recovering great treasure!*

Valuable lessons learned

We learned some valuable lessons over these last 40 or so years, and because so much treasure is at stake in the text of the liturgy, the Holy See set forth guidelines for how the new translation was to be carried out in a document called *Liturgiam Authenticam* – the full name of which contains the following subtitle:

The Fifth Instruction for the Right Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

A work of Vatican II

This rather lengthy subtitle refers, of course, to the first document to emerge from the Second Vatican Council, “The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), in which the Council Fathers outlined their vision for liturgical reform. This tells us something very important:

The new English translation of the Roman Missal is in no way a departure from Vatican Council II; rather, it's *directly related* to it.

This means that in order to prepare for the new edition of the Missal, *every one of us* – our pastors included – really need to discover and embrace what the Council Fathers actually taught. Why? Because apart from this, the new translation will lack vital context and we will be hard pressed to recognize why this effort to prepare is so very important. And make no mistake, it will take effort!

Now, I probably don't need to tell you that most of us aren't nearly as familiar with what the Council Fathers actually taught about Holy Mass (and many other things) as we should be, but even so, nearly everyone is aware of at least one crucial fact; namely, that there is a great deal of confusion over the Council's true intentions.

If this describes you, don't despair. The good news is that *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, like all of the conciliar decrees, was written for *all* Catholics – not just for scholars and clergymen. It is an incredibly rich, deep and beautiful document, and to journey into the Council's teachings by the light of sacred Tradition is to embark on a journey as on an encounter with Christ. Be sure to explore the Council documents. Soon! Dependable resources are available at www.HarvestingTheFruit.com.

The necessity of liturgical catechesis

In addressing the effort to prepare for the Roman Missal - 3rd Edition, Pope Benedict XVI said, “The opportunity for catechesis that this time presents will need to be firmly grasped... so that the change will serve as a springboard for a renewal and a deepening of Eucharistic devotion all over the English-speaking world.”

All glory, praise and honor to Almighty God!